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Politics in Western Europe

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ALL OF US are much concerned over tension in world politics of which the Berlin Question has become symbolic. There is little doubt that Russia aspires to dominate the continent of Europe. The United States appears to be determined not to allow that aspiration to succeed. This conflict between the two giants is also revealed in the internal politics of England, France and Italy—particularly in that of the Latin Sisters. Symbolic of the weakness of both in post-war world politics are similar passages in their new constitutions. In the *Preamble* of the French constitution one reads that "On condition of reciprocity France accepts the limitations of sovereignty necessary to the organization and defense of peace." In Article 11 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic there is the more elaborate statement that "Italy repudiates war as an instrument of offensive action against the liberty of other peoples and as a means for the resolution of international controversies; it consents, on condition of parity with other states, to limitations of sovereignty necessary to an order for assuring peace and justice among nations; it promotes and favors international organizations directed toward that end." These "leads" would appear to be from weakness rather than from strength.

I

IT IS RATHER OBVIOUS that Italy, France—and Britain too—have Communist parties that are directed from abroad mainly through native leaders who have been trained in Moscow. The Italian Communist Party has a claimed membership that runs to more than two and a quarter million. The membership of the French Communist Party is said to be less than 900,000—having dropped from a high of more than 1,000,000

in the post-war period. The British Communist Party is supposed to embrace a total less than 50,000. Communist strength in the British House of Commons is negligible, with 2 seats out of 640. But in the French National Assembly the Communist Party (counting in the M.U.R.F. fellow travelers) is the largest one with a total of 183 in 618 members. Communists and left-wing Socialists together have almost one-third of the total seats in the Italian Chamber of Deputies—182 of 574. Of the 8,000,000 votes cast for the Italian "Popular Front" in April, 1948, it is estimated that three-fourths were cast by Communists. As the Rome Correspondent of the Christian Science Monitor observed after the April elections, "No party which can attract an estimated 6,000,000 votes under the relentless pressure to which the Communist Party was subjected is either weak, moribund or resourceless." The pressure, it may be recalled, came from the Vatican, from the American Government, from Drew Pearson and the Friendship Trains, and from private persons of Italian ancestry in the U.S., who deluged relatives in Italy with thousands of letters urging them to vote against the Communists.

In painting the present political picture we cannot stop with party membership and election statistics. Organized labor—the General Confederations of France and Italy—are largely controlled by the Communists, although their Communist officers have never been able to marshal all the workers for a general strike. It is estimated that about 50 per cent of the organized workers in France are officered by Communists, and 80 per cent in Italy. Widespread strikes have been called, particularly in the late months of 1947 and 1948—some of which proved rather inopportune. The newly organized French *Force Ouvrière* has recently taken more than one and one-half million French workers away from the General Confederation and separatist movements have evidenced themselves in Italy. In Britain, where Communist strength in the labor unions is negligible—so far as numbers is concerned—Clement Attlee has considered it necessary, periodically, to warn Labour Party and co-operative officials, as well as trade unionists, that their organizations throughout the country stand in constant danger of being captured, as he puts it, "by small and active Communist minorities."

On the other side of the picture, there is no American political party in these European countries. The nearest approach was exhibited on the local level during the Rome municipal election in 1947 when a fly-by-night group calling itself the *Movimento Unionista Italiano* came forward with the proposal that Italy be incorporated into the United States as the forty-ninth state. Its vote was very light.

All the while, however, the American government has been making friends and influencing people in European politics. Secretary of State Marshall outlined the ERP in his speech at Harvard early in June 1947. On June 1, de Gasperi formed an Italian cabinet with Communists and Nenni Socialists left out—and they have not got back in since. About a month earlier, Communists were forced out of the cabinet of French Premier Ramadier, and they have not got back since. Perhaps there are no causal connections here, but de Gasperi had been in the United States conferring with President Truman the previous January. It was reported from Rome that he had returned from Washington with promises of a large loan and a firm intention to oust the Communists from his government. There are other pieces that fit into the picture. On Nov. 22, 1947, when Robert Schuman was seekingly parliamentary approval of his designation as French Premier, Foreign Minister Bidault interrupted a Communist speaker in the National Assembly to report, "Yesterday I received word from the American government that 54,000 extra tons of wheat will be shipped to France soon." On Oct. 5, 1947, de Gasperi was being subjected to three motions of no-confidence in the Italian Constituent Assembly. But before the voting started the Foreign Minister, Count Sforza, broke into the debate and brought the members of the Assembly to their feet, cheering, through the announcement that the United States had renounced its share of the Italian fleet. The American State Department indicated, previous to last April's Italian elections, that if the Communists won it would mean the end of ERP aid to Italy. These examples of coincidences are chosen at random.

The Socialist parties of Britain, France and Italy have broken ties with the Communists on their left and have become oriented toward the center. A special reservation must be made for Italy, however, where the Socialists have split. British, French and part of the Italian Socialists are in their governments. The Communist parties of France and Italy have not been in governing coalitions since mid-1947. Of course, ever since the British General Election of 1945, the two Communist members of Parliament have been more in the opposition than Winston Churchill himself—although for different reasons.

The break between Socialists and Communists came first—and came decisively—in Britain. The Communists formally attempted to adhere to the Labour Party but were rebuffed at the annual Labour Party Conference at Bournemouth in June, 1946. At that session the Labour Party, which is largely composed of associations rather than individual

members, amended its consitution so as to exclude from affiliation all organizations "having their own program, principles and policy for distinctive propaganda. . . or owing allegiance to any political organization situated abroad. . ."

Progressively, the determination was more difficult for French and Italian Socialists. Both of these countries are normally governed, not by a single party that emerges from an election with a majority position in parliament, but by party coalitions. Initially, after the Liberation, the French Communists, Socialists and the post-war Popular Republican Movement joined together in the government, and in the framing and adoption, upon a second attempt, of a new constitutional document. Co-operation also existed in the enactment of a number of nationalization statutes which had been foreshadowed in the *Resistance Charter*, which was supported by all political parties and Resistance groups. The French Socialist attitude toward the neighboring party to its left during this period is partially revealed in the statements made by Socialist leaders. Leon Blum observed that "although the [French] Communists have regained their freedom to think for themselves they have not yet acquired the ability to do so." An example or two of Blum's theses might be supplied. The Paris correspondent of *The New York Times* reported in November of 1947, that the Communist daily, *L'Humanité*, "commented almost favorably on the European Recovery Program until Foreign Minister Molotoff came to Paris to denounce it." Later, after Andrei Zdhanov's report to the Cominform in Warsaw had been published in the French language, the French Communist leader, Jacques Duclos, used exact phrases from it in a speech before the National Assembly, and *l'Humanité* printed quotations from the same source. Later, on Nov. 21, 1947, Blum, as Premier-designate, told the National Assembly that "international Communism has openly declared war on French democracy." This charge of Blum's was given specific meaning by a fellow Socialist, Minister of the Interior, Jules Moch, in an address to the Socialist Party Conference on Oct. 10, 1948. Moch disclosed that Zdhanov had, shortly before his death in 1948, announced directions to the French Communists to sabotage the ERP by all means, "to begin [strike] operations in September," and to secure the complete collapse of the French economy by means of strikes. Responsibility for the French October coal strikes, interestingly enough, came to be a matter of controversy between John L. Lewis and William Green in the United States a few days before the Presidential Election. According to Associated Press dispatches, Green contended,

as did the French Socialists, that the strikes were sponsored and managed by Communists.

In Italy, the break between Communists and Socialists has been less sharp and much more entailed, for the Nenni Socialists aligned with the Communists in the Popular Front and waged electoral contests under this banner for both chambers of the new Italian parliament in April, 1948. The Italian Socialists split, however, at the end of 1946, and the dissident Saragat group, polling over 7 per cent of the total popular vote in the April, 1948 elections, entered the Christian Democrat—de Gasperi government, even before that election had taken place. Close and careful observers of these elections seem to agree that although the Communists did not lose strength in the balloting the Nenni Socialists lost very heavily. So much so, indeed, that the break between Communists and Socialists in Italy follows the same trend—although haltingly—that had been exhibited in England and France. The Saragat Italian Socialists—the Italian Workers Socialist Party—originally broke with the Nenni group on the issue of co-operation with the Communists.

II

So far, the current internal politics of the three countries has been set forth in terms of its relation to world politics. Only a rash foreigner would expect a high degree of success in attempting to appraise British French or Italian politics as it is viewed internally in each country. Hazardous as our quest may be, it is necessary here for several reasons. For one, it scarcely needs mention that the British, French and Italians do not regard themselves as mere phenomena for outside exploitation. For another, they have many political problems *internally,* the intensity of which foreigners cannot comprehend either precisely or adequately; and, for a third, the political parties of each of these countries are attached to a unique history, interwoven with episodes, relationships and personalities which escapes the understanding of a foreign observer. Take, for example, the widespread policy of nationalization that has been applied in the three countries during the Nineteen Thirties and Forties. By and large, the three countries have not nationalized the same things. By and large, both the motives and the political parties engaged have been different, as have schemes of remuneration and patterns of management after the nationalizations took place. Page upon page of explanation would be required to spell out these differences.

In Britain it is well understood that the white collar people—the swing-

able vote—determines whether Labour or the Conservatives will have a majority in the House of Commons. Due to the workings of the electoral system, the oscillations in party strength in Commons are greater than oscillations in the popular vote. In July of 1945, the Labour Party got the swingable vote, and with it 393 seats in the House of Commons to 189 for the Conservatives. For the first time in its history the Labour Party possessed a good working majority in Parliament, a majority sufficient to carry to the statute books its distinctive program of nationalization and expansion of the social services. Save for the measure for the nationalization of the iron and steel industry—behind which the impulsion seems to have been uncertain and unsteady—the program has been put into effect. An Englishman might recall that it is rather fatal for a political party to achieve such a high degree of success. The Liberal Party did this early in the twentieth century. For a long period it has split into two main groups, but the sum of the splits reached the grand total of twenty-five members of the House of Commons as a result of the elections of 1945. The Conservative Party has recently moved—as it has usually done in the past—to accept large parts of recent nationalization. In the "Industrial Charter" approved at the Party Conference in 1947, it accepted nationalization of the Bank of England, the coal industry and the railroads, but took the position that road transport and civil aviation should be denationalized. On the other hand, there seems to be a good deal of difference of opinion among Labour Party leaders over the nationalization of iron and steel. Meanwhile, the new Parliament Act—which reduces the House of Lord's suspensive veto over the Commons from two years to one year—is being passed through Commons the required three times. Labour will have all of 1949 and part of 1950 in which to make the nationalization of iron and steel an accomplished fact. The terms of its statute for this purpose were revealed late in October, 1948. The measure will be subject to prolonged debate, but, whatever its fate, the nationalization contemplated will undoubtedly be a source of major contention in the next parliamentary election, which must take place before the middle of 1950. If the explanation of Labour's success in the 1945 election by Labourite G. D. H. Cole is correct—that doubtful voters were swung to the Labour side because the program of nationalization appeared to be a cure for past unemployment and depressed industries —these voters may have changed views, or other views, by 1950. Or, some other unpredictable issue may arise in the interval.

French politics is always interesting, although the present writer finds

every semester that students are first inclined, and strongly-inclined, to call it a "mess." At first view there may seem to be neither rhyme nor reason in the record since late July of 1948. Premier Marie lasted four and one-half weeks; then Schuman failed during the interval of his acceptance as Premier by the National Assembly and the formation of his cabinet; then Schuman formed a cabinet but resigned the same evening. Queuille was approved on Sept. 10. Queuille, a Radical-Socialist, composed his Council of Ministers of representatives of all parliamentary groups—from Socialists on the Left, to, and including the Party of Republican Liberty on the Right. Then the National Assembly took a vacation. There is one steady clue to French politics, and that clue is the word "Centripetal." The Center governs France—under the Fourth Republic as under the Third. Upon the fall of the Marie government, the chief of the Paris Bureau of the *Christian Science Monitor* was "caught" in Normandy. Fortunately for our quest of French views on French politics, Mr. Volney D. Hurd recorded the interview with his hosts, M. Quibel and M. Duchêne.

"There you are," said Mr. Quibel, concluding some offhand remarks about the situations. "Well, I guess I'll be running along."

"But," I pressed, "your government has just fallen!"

In a polite Norman version of "so what," he told me that that was a very frequent happening and that he had to hurry along and see about some details in the hotel.

A government falling had about the same effect as the failure of the milkman to arrive on time—in fact, not as much.

"But," I said, turning to M. Duchêne, "this can't go on forever. What happens next?"

"Oh, there'll be another government, but it won't last. Look at this newspaper cartoon."

It showed an endless belt, like one sees at Christmas time in toy windows with the same sleigh and reindeers coming up time after time to make it look as though there were many.

On it were portrayed the various personalities which have headed the 13 French governments since the war. They would pop up, go across the scene for a brief few minutes, and then go under, only to come up again as the belt continued its endless course.

Everyone laughed heartily. It was the most apt thing they had seen. Little, silly, smiling, figures repeating over and over their short play—and of course getting nowhere. It delighted these Normans.

"But there must be end to this sometime." I said. "Even belts wear out."

"Well, if it gets too bad, then we will have to have a dictatorship to restore order," replied M. Duchêne.

"Yes, but will the French, who are so against tight controls, permit a dictatorship?" I asked.

"Of course not," replied my friend, in the most casual tone of voice. "The French won't stand a dictator—so we will have a revolution."

M. Duchêne might have been announcing that we were going to have ice cream and cake. And it was not child's play. It was just typically French that the thing that would shake Anglo-Saxons to their heels would be tossed off with a shrug of the shoulders by these people.

I persisted in trying to make M. Duchêne follow through. "But after the revolution you would have to form a new government. After all, the war was, in effect, a revolution, in that you had a chance to start from scratch. And from it you formed the present endless belt of rotating cabinets. What else would you get but the same thing?"

"You are right, my American friend," he said. "That is exactly what would happen. Dictatorship, revolution, and then back to the old formula. Still the endless belt."

"But what about France's international position? What will become of the country in the meantime?"

"Monsieur, look around you. Here in the farming country of France we have been going on exactly as our forebears for hundreds of years. We have had since the French revolution four republics, three Kings, and two empires. We have had hundreds of governments. But nothing changes here.

"In fact, it doesn't change enough. Many houses should have water and electricity which still go without them. Do you think that this new postwar version of government changes will make any real difference?"[1]

The Frenchman, whose point of view about French politics we are attempting to ascertain, would not be nearly as certain as some of our American columnists and newspaper headline writers that democratic and parliamentary France will fail—and that there will soon be a clash between the Communists and de Gaulle for mastery. French politics is an intimate game, as much played from the vest as an American presidential nominating convention. Integrations and reintegrations are involved in the formation of French cabinets, but bargaining is constant and there must be give and take. Every group that takes must give.

The breach between Communists and Socialists was described previously. Conceivably, if the Russians were to occupy France by armed force the French Communists would become the government. It was mentioned that the Communists control most of the members of the General Labor Confederation. But the recently organized *Force Ouvrière*, Labor Strength, the new labor organization—with over one and one-half million

[1] Volney D. Hurd, " 'But Still There is France,' say Peasants as Cabinets Fall." Reprinted by permission from *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 9, 1948.

workers—supports the Socialists Party. The French Confederation of Christian Workers is a supporter of the M.R.P.

General de Gaulle and his Rally of the French People—founded early in 1947—really has no formal parliamentary group support. He has support in the emotions of many Frenchmen and is given tangible assistance with his R. P. F. by French military authorities. His chief claim to present political importance is that his R. P. F. secured almost 40 per cent of the vote in the French municipal elections of October 1947. Its goal had been set at 20 per cent. Since then he has been demanding the dissolution of the National Assembly and new elections thereto.

It must be obvious that municipal elections and national elections are altogether different. A Frenchman might easily change his voting in the two. In early cantonal elections, for example, the Radical Socialists attained far greater results than they did in national elections—either to the Constituent Assembly or the National Assembly. French observers of the results of the municipal elections of 1947 are of the conviction that de Gaulle's party received a goodly part of its vote from former supporters of the Radical Socialists and the M.R.P. Could he gain their support in a national election? Some Frenchmen have pointed out that it is very difficult to get rid of a Savior. We come back to what has been called the Third Strength—the groups in the National Assembly stretching from the Socialists on the Left to include the M.R.P. on the Right. On a chart this "Center" could be readily identified. The "Center" governed France under the Third Republic. It is governing now.

What is the present trouble? The trouble is that France cannot stabilize her currency. This is no new problem and de Gaulle himself tried his hand at it and failed before he retired in January 1946. All things are remembered in France. And—in spite of de Gaulle's bitter present opposition to the Communists—they were in his own cabinets while he was in power. It was Ramadier, a Socialist, who threw the Communists out. For some months now there have been plans for balancing the budget and dealing with the franc. But all plans contain proposals that one or more political groups have been unable to accept. In spite of the split between the Socialists and Communists on the question of world politics, both parties represent the workers of France. To a lesser extent the M.R.P. does also. The Socialists must stand for things the workers wish to have. Although they have been represented in all recent cabinets, including the present one, they have been forced to ask for increased wages

for workers—budget balancing or no budget balancing—and let the franc turn out to be what it may. This explains the fall of Marie and Schuman.

It is easy to say that a stronger executive power is what France needs—as General de Gaulle says. But the French always raise the question to which there is never a unanimous answer: Which *person* is to have this power?

With France's Latin Sister we encounter a problem from which France is free —the problem of a yearly excess of 500,000 births over deaths and most avenues of migration throughout the world closed. Italy is the country in which writers have calmly claimed at periods in modern history that "we were better off when we were worse off." It is a land where people may turn to affairs spiritual because there is not much in the way of affairs temporal to which they can turn. It possesses mountainous terrain, little coal and iron and a non-land-holding peasantry. Truly, here is a most appropriate client for ERP, and by the same token a country in which membership in the Communist Party—according to latest published figures—is second only to the membership within Russia itself. These remarks are not made as criticisms; they are made in an attempt to portray the difficulties faced by any Italian government. The very results of the Chamber elections of April 1948, are likely to be misleading, for a chart would show the huge Christian Democrat Party in a majority position in the "Center." It has been pointed out, for one thing, that as many as three or four of the thirteen million who voted for the Christian Democrats were not particularly sympathetic to the party: they voted for the one main anti-communistic group. For another thing, about eight million Italian voters, confronted with a choice between Church and a Popular Front directed from Moscow, cast their ballots for the latter.

Perhaps the most that can be said is that the April election furnishes an opportunity for five years for Italy to attempt to solve some of its problems in a parliamentary manner. Paper proposals exist. The Christian Democratic Party's National Council has called for land reforms, tax reforms, and for raising the workers' standard of living. The last-mentioned objective would be achieved by half-a-dozen methods, including the encouragement of large scale emigration from Italy. Without outlining these reforms more fully, it can be easily comprehended that some of them would prove costly to the very groups that supported the Christian Democrats in the last election. Six months after the elections little seems to have been accomplished.

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