

In this study of the domain of one of the most powerful steel and munitions families in France we see how industrial feudalism maintains its sway.

# Steeltown, France

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Translated from *Lumière*,  
Paris Radical Weekly

BY THE side of the road which leads from Metz to Hayange the Wendel Chateau turns its stately back upon the houses of the workers. The passer-by can see only the walls of the park, a chapel of yellow stone, and a neglected farm building. But right by the gate, where a uniformed guard keeps watch, a small tower springs out of the shrubbery. It offers its white walls complacently to the curious eye of the stranger, its small turret with brand-new slate tiles, and, cut in the stone in large characters, a date: 1767.

This little tower, so devoutly restored, is the dovecote of the manor. But no silvery wings flash in the sun; there is no cooing in the shrubbery, no sudden, silken whirl of flying wings brushing against the roof—all this is gone. The empty dovecote never opens its windows. It is there merely to remind the passer-by that the Wendels have enjoyed seigniorial rights for two centuries. Under the old régime the building of a dovecote was a privilege reserved for the seigneurs only. It flat-

ters Mr. Humbert de Wendel's pride to keep this visible symbol of his rank and title at the side of the road where his workers can see it on their way to and from the factory.

Nevertheless, his ancestors were once upon a time mere commoners, baring their swords in the service of the Dukes of Lorraine. Coming originally from Coblenz—where there lived an executioner by the same name—Christian Wendel attached himself around 1660 to the powerful house of Lavaux, whose estates were situated between Rodange and Longlaville near Longwy. His father, a colonel in a regiment of Cravates, and he himself, a cavalry lieutenant in the army of Charles IV, profited by the wars which ended in the French annexation of Lorraine. Although they grew rich in mercenary warfare, they advanced not a whit from their commoners' class: we see their descendant, Martin Wendel, a steward in the household of the Lords of Ottange.

The administration of the manor

must have proved lucrative, for in 1704 Martin Wendel bought the Hayange iron works. At that time, when iron-forging was an art to which the Dukes of Lorraine accorded great honors, the right of 'forging' soon brought patents of nobility in its wake. Martin Wendel, who in 1705 had acquired the manor of Hayange, received with his patents of nobility the right to build the symbolic dovecote. His son, Charles, built other factories at Homburg and at Kreuzwald. By the time the Revolution came, his widow, Madame d'Hayange, and their son, François (who founded the Creusot works, the Indret cannon casting foundries and the weapon casting works at Charleville and Tulle, and who was also proprietor of the Pierart, Berchiwé and Roussel foundries) found themselves at the head of the most important centralized industry of their time.

In a pamphlet which was distributed among the members of the factory staff, as well as in another more expensive brochure, the house of Wendel asserts that it has never made, and is not now engaged in making, cannons. Nevertheless, in 1788 the lady of Hayange addressed to the Marshal de Ségur a note in which she made representations to the effect 'that for more than a century the foundries of Hayange, of which she was an owner, have been engaged in furnishing the artillery with shells, bullets, gun-carriages for mortars, gun-caps and cast-iron cannon balls.' An historian, Dr. Alfred Weyhmann, writes that 'military supplies produced by the Hayange foundries brought their owners great prestige, which they could otherwise never have hoped to attain—to be sure, prestige of a somewhat sinister

character, but also possessing remarkable historical interest.'

While Madame d'Hayange was marshaling her factories in the service of the Revolutionary armies, her sons were fighting in the foreign armies. Thus they defended their recently acquired aristocracy and the feudal privileges already enjoyed by their iron industry against the onslaughts of the Republic.

The Revolution did not confiscate the Wendel factories immediately. Madame de Hayange, who now bore the name of Citizeness Wendel, took for a time an active part in the supervision of the factories, which were placed under the jurisdiction of the War Department. Finally the factories were put up for auction and sold for 16,000,000 francs. The buyer having become bankrupt, the Wendels rebought them for 220,000 francs. At that time they were already employing several hundred workers.

## II

It was still the time of wood-fed furnaces and of hydraulic power. Soon coke was to replace wood in the shafts of the blast furnaces. François de Wendel, a great industrial figure, acquired, while abroad, some new technical knowledge, particularly in the technique of puddling. He bought the Moyeuvre foundries, as well as the Forest of Styring near Forbach. Under the forest there were coal deposits containing just the sort of pit coal that the Wendels had vainly sought in the Thionville vicinity when they needed it so badly for manufacturing cast-iron cannon balls. By insuring ample reserves of wood for himself, the master of the iron works at the same time

laid in reserves of combustible minerals. When the first coal pits replaced those smoking heaps of charcoal that used to be scattered in the forest, the Wendels possessed, along with the best industrial equipment of that time, all the raw materials they needed.

The prodigious advance in the metallurgical industry towards the middle of the nineteenth century made the fortune of this family enterprise. Then, unexpectedly, came the war, and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. Hayange, Moyeuvre, Styring-Wendel and Petite-Rosselle passed over to Germany. The Wendels had to choose between the two fatherlands; they chose both. A German company called Les Petits-Fils de François de Wendel et Cie. continued to exploit the older factories. A French society of Wendel and Company built the Jœuf factory on the border. Soon the two companies succeeded in an operation which increased their industrial power tenfold in a few years. They bought the monopoly of the Thomas patent for Alsace-Lorraine and the Meurthe-et-Moselle plants.

The application of the Bessemer process after 1856 had ushered in the era of steel. But it was impossible to use the Bessemer furnace for refining the molten iron extracted from the phosphorous iron ore of Lorraine and Meurthe-et-Moselle. The steel business thrived; but the factories built on the Lorraine iron ore deposits could not use the new equipment. Their future was thus endangered.

They tried to find a means of making the Bessemer furnace immune to phosphorus. In London an insignificant employee of the Tower Court, whose great passion was chemistry, lost his health in an effort to solve this

difficult problem. After ten years he solved it. But he was ill, and on the point of starvation. A director of the Stenay works, Mr. Taskin, offered him fifty pounds for the license to use the process in the east of France. Sidney Thomas accepted, and was paid 1250 francs; the next day Robert de Wendel bought the monopoly of the process to use in the Meurthe-et-Moselle works, paying 8,000 francs for it. At the same time his brother, Henri de Wendel, bought up the monopoly rights for Alsace-Lorraine. Thus the house of Wendel was in a position not only to improve its methods of production considerably, but also to hinder the establishment and development of any competing companies. Until 1895 the monopoly which the house of Wendel enjoyed in Lorraine allowed it to keep down the competing German companies, which could not use the Thomas process. In Meurthe-et-Moselle Mr. Robert de Wendel ceded the Thomas license to the Longwy steel works at the price at which he bought it, plus certain royalties; he also entered the administrative counsel of that society, which was to become one of the most important in the country.

During all this time poor Sidney Thomas, wasted by illness, vainly tried to improve his health. He died in 1885 at thirty-five years of age. One can see his neglected grave in the Passy cemetery. Over it stands a simple cross covered with ivy and bearing this inscription: 'He fought a good fight.' Yes, but he lived in misery, and without the sum of three million francs which Siemens paid him at the end of his life, he would have died in poverty.

The house of Wendel owes its whole prodigious fortune today to a poor

English chemist, the fiftieth anniversary of whose death it neglected to celebrate last year. The seigneurs of Hayange, by divine right lords of iron industries, are grateful only to the Lord. They did not erect any monument to the memory of Sidney Thomas, but instead they built, on the most conspicuous spot in their manor, a beautiful church whose stained-glass windows gleam resplendently in the sun.

The workers were constrained to participate in this pious sign of their patron's gratitude. Two windows of the Hayange church bear the following inscription: 'Gift of the Steel Workers,' and 'Gift of the Miners.' And in the choir, on both sides of the altar, where all the churches in the world usually depict religious scenes, one may see the Wendel family, the noble ladies, dressed in the costumes of feudal times, teaching the Lord's Prayer to their children, dressed as pages. The lords of the manor are not there. Only a discreetly drawn landscape with factories in the background hints at their temporal activities. Every Sunday the faithful of the Hayange parish prostrate themselves before the Wendel family, just as the parishioners of Creusot bow before Mr. Henri Schneider, who is seen entering Paradise with his drooping mustaches and his blacksmith's hammer.

### III

From a hill overlooking the valley of Fentsch, Our Lady of Hayange bestows her benediction upon the industrial city below her. Gently she contemplates the factories, the chateau and the colony where the men who work for the House of Wendel live.

Her two hands outstretched, she embraces them all in a single blessing.

The city of Hayange lives and works under the protection of the Virgin. The blazing stained-glass window in the church choir perpetuates for all eternity the piety of the praying and psalm-singing Wendels. When, on the conclusion of fifty years of honorable service, Mr. Albert Bosmañt, the director of the Joeuf factory, was fêted by the Wendel company, that faithful servant did not forget to render due homage to the Church. "I don't want to forget," he said in his address, 'the representatives of the clergy, with whom I have been on the best of terms throughout my long career. I have always had the greatest respect for them, for they teach us a great moral lesson, one which we ought to remember and uphold, no matter what we do. This lesson has been the mainstay of the House of Wendel from the very first days of its existence—a factor which has had a lot to do with its present stability.'

At Joeuf, at Moyeuvre, at Hayange, the Lord reigns on the right hand of the Messrs. de Wendel. He has his quarters like the members of the factory staff. He is provided with well-paid officiating ministers. The kingdom of the Wendels is the kingdom of the Lord.

But not even the Lord God himself is allowed to join a union!

One day a priest from the Orne valley presented himself at the Hayange mansion at the head of a Young Christian workers' delegation. The priest and the young Catholic workers were going to ask Mr. Humbert de Wendel's permission to organize a Christian workers' union. The priest referred to the moral lesson so highly

praised by director Bosmant, and, to convince the pious lords of the steel-works still further, quoted a bit from the Encyclical.

The response was short and brutal. *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo* notwithstanding, the House of Wendel, which builds churches and pays salaries to various priests and vicars, would not permit a union—not even a Christian union. Besides, the Lord does not know the first thing about social and economic questions! Let him look after the immortal souls which the House of Wendel supplies Him with by the million. On Sunday mornings at Moyeuivre and Joeuf, the company spies point the way to the church, which is always full. The House pays, and provides living quarters for, the French, Italian and Polish priests, not to mention the nuns and various religious societies. Right across the way from the Government schools it builds its Catholic schools, which the Concordat allows to be supported by the State in Moselle.

#### IV

Thus from his childhood on the son of a worker or a paid employee who was born on the land of the Lords of Hayange is caught in toils of moral and physical subjugation to the factory. He gets his milk from a feeding bottle dispensed by the bosses at the public nursery. His swaddling-clothes come from the layette given the loyal subjects on request. His whooping cough and scarlet fever are treated by a factory doctor. He owes his games and his holidays to the children's groups which are organized in the factory. He learns his French history and his morals in factory schools—for it

takes courage to send a child to those provided by the Government. Later on he will engage in sports on the factory grounds, because there is no other place available, and in the factory clubs, because there are no independent clubs. Before he is hired by the factory, he must pledge absolute loyalty to the House. In order to stay on he must be docile, avoid Left meetings, attend the meetings of the Right, and if necessary even join a section of the Croix de Feu or the Fascist Leagues. At the least show of independence, the worker is forced into the hardest and worst paid jobs. If the offense is repeated, he is discharged and blacklisted by all the factories of that region. Organized espionage penetrates even into private houses: one distrusts one's neighbor, one does not dare to speak out even in one's own house. At Joeuf they made the school children vote on the eve of the elections in order to find out the political convictions of their parents!!!

The Wendels have eyes that see all, ears that hear all. If Branly, Marconi or Lee de Forest were to invent a machine for detecting men's thoughts, the Wendels would immediately obtain the rights to it. But the machine has not yet been invented: that is why Deputy Beron got a majority vote in Hayange.

It is not only the wage workers in the factory who feel the Wendels' hand heavy upon them. Their control extends to a part of local trade, to the local administration, and to the neighboring mayoralities. At Joeuf, the police, the tax collectors, the police commissioner live in houses belonging to the factory. At Hayange the police department, the tax collector, the Registry officials are also housed at the



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expense of the factory. The officials, the teachers, the salesmen are given the use of a complimentary card to the Bursar's Office—provided they are not suspected of harboring radical views. Thus insidiously does the factory extend its domination even to those who should be in a position to escape it completely.

When the Mayor of Hayange is not directly connected with the factory in the capacity of employee or a salesman, the Comité des Forges or the Comptoir Sidérurgique see to it that he has a considerable commercial backing. In 1929 the Mayors of villages nearby fell victims to a curious mishap. The then Mayor of Knutange, upon being accused by Beron of having accepted 18,000 francs from the House of Wendel, cried: 'I had the right to take it! *The others* have been getting the same sum for two years!' I don't know how 'the others' justified themselves after this outburst. I do know, however, that Mr. Mercier did not long keep his office as Mayor of Knutange.

Masters of the men around them, masters of the local administration, are the Wendels living in quiet contentment? No; for they still do not own the minds of their people, and every four years, in the privacy of a voting booth, those people assert themselves in an anonymous revolt. One of the turners in the plating plant, a clear-eyed, vigorous man with a strong will of his own, became prominent among his fellow workers. The Wendels fired him from the factory, and thus initiated him into the workers' secret fraternity. Beron could not find a hall in which to address the voters; nobody dared to greet him on the street; but Beron was elected! A

Communist deputy yesterday and a deputy for the Popular Front today, Beron is known in this region above all as the man who has dared to oppose the Wendels.

Schneider managed to defeat Paul Faure; the Wendels cannot rid themselves of Beron. And so, to protect himself against the dangers inherent in universal suffrage, de Wendel marshals around him his Fascist forces.

# V

At Joeuf, at Moyeuvre, at Hayange, the Francistes and the Croix de Feu are playing the bosses' game. It was Emmanuel Mitry, François Wendel's son-in-law, who first founded the Croix de Feu movement that has sprung up in the Hayange city government. Mr. de Mitry keeps the factory books. They are in good hands, for this Lord of the Bottange manor, who counts the flowers in his parks because he is afraid that his gardeners might steal some, has gained the reputation of a skinflint. But he spares no expense when it comes to subsidizing these militant organizations, which may one day precipitate a civil war. Padovani, the director of the factory railroad line, who is also the son-in-law of Humbert de Wendel's secretary, is Hayange's *Führer*. In certain jobs constant pressure has been put on the workers and employees to get them to join the Croix de Feu. If anybody pleads inability to pay the dues because of the high cost of living, they offer to pay them for him. Padovani's group is one of the most active in France. In his addresses this director of the factory railway service makes vehement attacks on the misdeeds of 'super-capitalism.'

After having shown some promise, Bucard's Francistes now seem to have been left to their own devices, and are disbanding. At Joeuf some leaders still continue to recruit members into the ranks of the Solidarité Française. The Italian workers, of whom there are many in the mines, have been corralled into various Fascist organizations. At Joeuf, where de Wendel houses an Italian priest and supports an Italian school, sisters of the charitable orders at one time took to seeking out the orphans of those killed in the Ethiopian war. Hayange has seen processions of black shirts in its streets. The miners of the Wendel firm have been forced to pledge their allegiance to the native land of Fascism, and those who could not be induced by bribery were prevailed upon through fear of losing their jobs. Hayange also has its Italian priest and teachers, all Fascist agents. On June 2nd a great military Fascist demonstration took place in the hall of the Italian mission. Mayor Mohnen and the director of the Daussy factories took part in a festival given for the benefit of the Italian Red Cross; the next day one of the Duce's agents solemnly read Mussolini's address of May 9th, in which he proclaimed the birth of the Fascist Empire.

## VI

When I visited Joeuf last month, I stopped to ask directions of a housewife. We were both going the same way; she came along with me. We walked through a colony of houses which were all alike, each one with a tiny garden around it. With a wide gesture the woman indicated the

church, the school, the recreation hall and all the symmetrical streets.

'All this is theirs,' she said simply. Then she added, 'It's just like in old times, in the times of the feudal lords . . .'

France had just gone to the polls. A few days earlier the workers of Joeuf had dared to carry Phillippe Serre to victory. A change was already apparent; this woman was not afraid to voice to a total stranger her recognition of the oppressive feudal atmosphere which reigns in the Wendel domains.

The victory of the Popular Front has dealt the first blow against the domination of the Lords of Hayange and Joeuf. This particular defeat is one of the telling effects of the great tidal wave which has raised the proletariat of the whole country to the top. The Wendels, who had no use for unions, were forced to recognize the workers' right to organize; they are now carrying on negotiations with the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Federation of Labor) and assenting to collective bargaining. Certainly, at the first opportunity they have they will do all in their power to restore the former state of things. They still have their weapons for psychological domination of that whole region. For the moment, they bow before the inevitable; and a kind of revolution is now in process at Moselle and Meurthe-et-Moselle. As Jouhaux recently said, 'This region, which up to now has been completely enslaved, has suddenly regained its freedom.' The Wendels must not be allowed to take that freedom away again.

The first of these articles describes developments in Eastern Siberia; in the second we listen in while a Japanese reveals his nation's plans for expansion in the South Seas; from the third we learn a Shanghai gang's history.

# Three *from* *the East*

## I. BUREYASTROY AND BIRO-BIDJAN

By A HARBIN CORRESPONDENT

From the *China Weekly Review*, Shanghai English-Language Weekly

FEW persons seem to have any idea of Bureyastroy; yet the successful completion of this Soviet project is bound to have a tremendous effect on the political situation of the Far East, immensely contributing to the security of the Soviet Far East, at present menaced by Japanese aggression. Bureyastroy is the name given to a series of ambitious plans of the Soviet Government to develop and industrialize a vast region lying between the upper reaches of the Bureya River, flowing into the Amur some distance below Taheiho, and the middle course of the Amur itself at a place where it turns northward before it empties into the Gulf of Tartary.

There are probably only a few regions so desolate and dreary as the

upper reaches of the Bureya River. It is a sea of rugged mountains and tangled woods, with no population worth speaking of; yet it turns out to be a veritable storehouse of various natural resources, so that the Soviet Government appears to be ready to develop it ahead of all regions in the Far East. In this respect, the importance attached to Bureyastroy comes only second to that of Dnieprostroy and Kuznetskstroy, the two giant projects now fully occupying the attention of the Kremlin and the Soviet public.

It seems to be correct to state that, judging by present indications, as soon as the Dnieprostroy and Kuznetskstroy projects are completed, the Soviet Government will throw the full weight