

burden. Delbos bears this burden with grace and courage. He faces fate without a quaver. Perhaps he is less interested in fate than in the belief that nothing in the world is ever lost, not even foreign policy, be it good or bad. Perhaps he is familiar with the observation of Bossuet: 'There is no human power that does not serve purposes other than its own, whether it wants to or not.'

COMRADE THOREZ

By ANDREY SIEDYKH

Translated from the *Poslednie Novosti*, Paris Russian Émigré Social-Democratic Daily

WHEN Premier Léon Blum was forming his Popular Front Cabinet last summer, nearly everyone believed that Maurice Thorez would be given an important portfolio. But the Communist leader preferred to remain Secretary General of his party and absolutely refused to accept a post.

At the present time Thorez is playing a very special rôle in the political life of France. He holds in his hand the fate of the Blum Cabinet, the entire Popular Front and perhaps even that of the Republic. His friends consider him the 'French Stalin' and predict that he will head the future 'French Soviet Socialist Republic.' His enemies prophesy a bad end for him.

The truth is that neither his friends nor his enemies really know much about Thorez. Among the general public he is a man whose political activities matter greatly but whose private life is of little concern. Even French Communists seldom know the careers of their leaders. They probably do not know that Marcel Cachin, Thorez's predecessor, is the son of a devout Catholic gendarme, that Vaillant-Couturier in his youth used to compose reverent sonnets to the Virgin Mary, that Florimond Bonte prepared himself for the Church, and that Marty, the hero of the Black Sea Fleet, was acquitted in court martial only because his counsel vouched for his feeble-mindedness.

But what about Thorez, the spiritual father of the Popular Front movement, the man who injected patriotism into French Communism, recognized the 'bourgeois' *Marseillaise* and broke up a series of 'sit-down' strikes by a single phrase to the effect that 'there is a time to end a strike?' Who is this Thorez?

He is, or rather was, a miner, and a miner's son and grandson. He was born thirty-six years ago in Nyelles Godault, a small village that is perpetually grimy with coal dust. Thorez is very proud of his humble antecedents. But if he was a miner, he didn't remain one very long. In

1914 the Department of Pas de Calais was occupied by the Germans and young Thorez was sent to Creuze. In this way his career as a miner ended when he was only fourteen years old. It is hardly possible that at this age he was already a true 'black-face,' as the miners of Pas de Calais call themselves. After the war, when he tried to come back to the mines, he was not accepted at his old place. It seems that he had already acquired some reputation as a Communist agitator. A living had to be made, so he got into construction work.

In 1923 he began his formal work for the party and moved steadily upward through the ranks of its official hierarchy. He became secretary of the Communist Federation of Pas de Calais, then a member of the French Central Committee and of the Political Bureau. During the Moroccan war he carried on intensive agitation on behalf of 'natives oppressed by French imperialism.' 'French imperialism' sent him, along with Cachin and Duclos, to the Santé. In the middle Twenties Thorez's name was still unknown except among party members, and even they were of the opinion that their most promising young leader was Doriot, Mayor of St. Denis, who was the favorite disciple of Cachin. It was not until 1932 that Thorez reached Parliament, thanks to the workers of the Parisian suburb of Ivry.

At first nobody in the Chamber paid any attention to this stocky, blond, always smiling Deputy. From time to time he would mount the rostrum to make a speech which he had carefully written down. According to custom, all the parliamentary reporters would promptly retire to the corridors, since everybody knew in advance exactly what charges Cachin, Doriot, Thorez, or other Communist speakers would hurl against Government.

Somehow the denunciatory content of Thorez's speeches has always seemed out of keeping with his snub nose, his smiling blue eyes and his winning *gaucherie*. Following party custom, Thorez always dresses very simply, but never sloppily. His suits are cheap, but they are always neat. He disdains vest and garters; but his necktie isn't too vivid and is skillfully tied. If you were to meet Thorez in the street, you might take him for a factory supervisor, the foreman of a construction gang, a small-time salesman—anything but a potential President of the future Council of Commissars.

FROM 1932 on his political career developed rapidly. He was elected Secretary General of the Party, visited Moscow, was photographed with Stalin and Dimitroff and brought back instructions to the Party from the Kremlin. On January 22, 1936, Thorez made a speech of tremendous political significance before the Congress of the French Communist Party. Following Moscow's example he abandoned the objective of

world revolution. The Party was to become national in its character. The French people were to unite in the face of the Nazi peril. A Popular Front had to be created, to carry on the fight for 'peace, bread and freedom.'

The word *patrie* is now admitted into the French Communist vocabulary. Thorez recognizes the historical past of the French people, reconciles the *Internationale* with the *Marseillaise* and the red flag with the Tricolor.

How sincere is this conversion to a new faith? It is hard for a French worker to forget the revolutionary traditions of the past fifty years. Thorez indeed praises Rouget de Lisle, but the *Internationale* is still being sung at the Communist rallies more often and with more enthusiasm than the *Marseillaise*. The Tricolor has been adopted by the Communists, but only as a tiny patch on the red flag. As strategy, the adoption of the new policy was a brilliant success. The Communist Party smiled with Thorez and won seventy-three seats in Parliament. From that moment Thorez became one of the rulers of France's destiny.

Since the victory of the Popular Front he has almost stopped using the parliamentary rostrum for his political sallies. His lieutenants speak in the Chamber more often than he does. Thorez himself has adopted the practice of recent French Premiers of speaking directly to the masses.

AN EXCELLENT opportunity to study Thorez is afforded by the Communist press conferences. He enters the hall where the reporters are waiting with a gay smile, his hand extended in friendly greeting. He knows very well that among the hundred reporters there is probably only one Communist representative—from *Humanité*. But that does not prevent him from playing the affable host. He is followed by the rotund Vice-President of the Chamber, the 'baker' Duclos, who can hardly waddle along fast enough to keep up with him.

Thorez sits down at a table covered with green felt, extracts from his ever-present briefcase a draft of his speech and begins to talk in tutorial, didactic tones. He is not gifted with eloquence as a Frenchman understands it. In his words there is no pathos, no vivid imagery, none of the *tremolo* which is so characteristic of the political speakers, particularly those from the South. Maurice Thorez is a Northerner. He is chary with his words. He does not permit a sudden burst of eloquence to carry him onto ground with which he is not familiar. But he has one immensely valuable faculty: the ability to say simply, clearly and accurately what he considers necessary. He is sparing with his gestures, too, merely emphasizing each important phrase with a flat sweep of his right hand.

A speech by Thorez is a lecture in which he obstinately tries to drive

what he considers to be incontrovertible truths into the heads of his listeners. He never becomes excited and speaks in the same manner to the empty benches in the Chamber and to a gathering of 30,000 workers. The important thing to him is not his audience, but rather what he has to say to it.

After a half hour's lecture the journalists begin to ask questions, sometimes extremely ticklish ones. Thorez never fails to answer, but his answers never satisfy. Ask him about the Moscow trials and executions, and he will answer with apparent conviction that they are an expression of the revolutionary tradition—that in this manner the revolution defends itself against its enemies. Doriot used to give the same answers to these questions once upon a time, but he always impressed one as a fanatic. Now Doriot is a Fascist.

It is interesting to speculate on what Thorez will think and say in, let's say, five years. People like to ask him how he can reconcile a Soviet régime in France with the Communist election platform, which includes respect for private property, religious freedom, etc. Thorez has his own theory about it, but I doubt that it would ever meet with Stalin's approval. He says: 'One thing happened in Russia, another will happen in France. We will have our French revolution in our own French fashion in harmony with French temperament and French customs.'

French home-owners and holders of treasury bonds may sleep in peace: Thorez has promised to leave them alone. For him a man becomes a capitalist *after* his income passes the million francs a year mark.

'Now that you are permitted to be patriotic. . .'

Thorez interrupts the questioner. 'Moscow,' he says proudly, 'has no right to permit or forbid anything to the French Communists. They became patriots in the face of external danger, thus restoring the revolutionary tradition of 1793.'

Duclos listens happily, nodding his head in approval. Yes, revolutionaries of 1793! Obviously he has completely forgotten his stay in the Santé for anti-war and anti-French propaganda. Thorez has also forgotten it, having turned patriot with amazing ease. Times have changed. Now Thorez must keep order, break up strikes and ask the workers to respect the law and private property. The extreme Rightist Deputy Ybarnegaray, who never misses an opportunity to bait Premier Blum, once shouted from his seat in the Chamber: 'We are not talking to the Government but to the real Minister of Interior, THOREZ!'

Thorez is not a Minister, but he was not at all surprised at Ybarnegaray's reference to him. As a leader of the masses he has been saddled with many Governmental responsibilities. His political career has become a paradox: after having been an incendiary all his life, he finds himself compelled to be a fireman.

PERIPATETIC AMBASSADOR

Translated from *Marianne*, Paris Liberal Weekly

THE famous Nord Express, which speeds between Paris and Berlin, sees a lot of the French Ambassador to Germany. Whenever relations between France and Germany become strained and the comments of the *Völkischer Beobachter* grow menacing, the corpulent and entirely placid little diplomat emerges from his compartment in the crack train at the Gare du Nord.

André Francois-Poncet has come home 'to straighten things out.' He will explain the 'imponderables' of the German mentality to the French Radical Ministers. Then he will hurry back to Berlin to reveal the psychological mysteries of his Latin people to the metaphysicians of the Third Reich.

A bourgeois, a typical French bourgeois, who has been caught in the whirlwind. But, unlike others of the type, he is a bourgeois who has learned to listen, to observe and to reflect. A clear-headed bourgeois who does not become panic-stricken when things go wrong, when events take an unexpected and threatening turn. An old member of the conservative Democratic Alliance who has become Léon Blum's Ambassador to Adolf Hitler.

What of the career of Francois-Poncet? He has had at least two careers. The first was that of a brilliant young scholar who showed promise of achieving great things in his chosen field. He was born on June 12, 1887 at Provins, in the Department of Seine-et-Marne, which is neither quite Parisian nor yet quite provincial. His father was a Judge on the Paris Court of Appeals. André was a brilliant student. He won a Fellowship in German at the Ecole Normale and was appointed Professor of German.

From about 1910 Francois-Poncet devoted himself more attentively than other students of Germany to the restlessness of the German spirit. He was one of those scholars who did not permit a profound knowledge of the past to blind him to contemporary realities. In 1911, when he was only twenty-four, he published both a very erudite treatise on Goethe and a penetrating essay on *What German Youth Is Thinking*. He also wrote articles in which he showed remarkable clairvoyance about the course of events in Germany.

When the war broke out Francois-Poncet's knowledge of the German language and of German policy was of great value to the French Foreign