

How France appears after one year of Daladier's régime; the place where her army of aliens congregates; what makes the wheels go round at Quai d'Orsay.

# France Today

## I. THE PASSING OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

By ALEXANDER WERTH

From the *Manchester Guardian*, Manchester Liberal Daily

IF THE attention of the world had not been absorbed elsewhere, if the menace of a European war had not eclipsed even events of such immense and tragic importance as the fall of Madrid and the end of the Spanish war, France would have been 'front page' news. But everything is relative; the extraordinary events that occurred in Paris immediately after the fall of Prague passed almost unnoticed, and were probably dismissed by many as a piece of 'internal politics.'

Over a year has passed since the Daladier Government came into office, and during this year France has undergone a profound change both internationally and internally. It would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that during this year France has ceased to be a democratic republic or, at any rate, a Parliamentary democ-

racy. The change came gradually but surely. Internationally France's position in Europe is entirely different from what it was a year ago. Not that a year ago France had not already suffered some severe setbacks. The setbacks had been numerous since 1935.

It is curious that the gradual triumph of the pro-Munich policy in France ran parallel with the growth of political reaction. On the whole, France was less conscience-stricken about Munich than was England, even though she had fewer illusions than England on its ultimate good. Pacifism and war-weariness are widespread in France: the peasantry is 'pro-Munich,' and in the Socialist Party and among the trade unions there were strong pacifist and pro-Munich currents. But the pro-Munich leadership was in the hands of a set of politicians with nu-

merous links with business and high finance and an enormous influence on the press, like M. Bonnet, M. Flandin, M. Caillaux, the 'uncrowned king of the Senate,' M. de Monzie, M. Mistler, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber, M. Chaumet, and some others. The manner in which France's will to resist was weakened throughout 1938 and how the Government's assurances to Czecho-Slovakia were wrapped up in more and more mental reservations make a remarkable, if not very noble, story.

## II

M. Daladier was wavering between the fulfillment of the often-repeated pledges to Czecho-Slovakia and his feeling that the French people were against risking war. And yet, though he signed the Munich Agreement, he felt uneasy about it for a long time, and it was not until December that he became completely converted to the Munich outlook, largely under the influence of M. Bonnet, who had pursued a 'Munich' policy with persistence and consistency ever since he had come into office in April.

M. Bonnet, M. Flandin and the rest had none of the self-righteous British illusions about Munich. They let Daladier declare his conviction to the Chamber that Czecho-Slovakia could manage perfectly well within her Munich frontiers, but they themselves were quite 'hard-boiled' about it. They knew that the annexation of the Sudetenland was not an end but a means for Germany. Actually a good part of the semi-official press made no secret of it that it would not consider an 'extension' of Munich (in other words, a free hand for Germany in the

east) incompatible with Franco-German friendship. In the view of Flandin and others, the great problem was to divert Germany's energies to the east. The semi-official press seriously—and hopefully—discussed the possibilities of the 'Greater Ukraine,' where Germany could satisfy her territorial ambitions and, with luck, use up her energies.

Unfortunately for these people, it soon became clear that they had made a miscalculation. Already in January there was no longer the same certainty that Hitler had turned his back to the west and was going to walk right into the Ukrainian trap the *Matin* and other papers had so considerably set for him. In February, however, there was a spell of 'optimism' in Paris: Mr. Roosevelt had uttered a warning to Germany and Mr. Chamberlain a warning to Italy, and it was thought that neither would budge. And then came the 15th of March.

The French public was perhaps slow to grasp the meaning of it. Paris did not become excited until forty-eight hours later, and the first reaction in certain official quarters was significant: they declared that there was nothing so very startling in what had happened; it was a consequence of the mistakes made at Versailles in 1919 and so on. When one recalled Munich and the Anglo-French 'guarantee,' they shrugged their shoulders. Some of them looked almost pleased because Hitler had 'gone east' after all. And of course they said that the Italians were greatly shocked.

Parliament was convened in a hurry—but not to discuss the foreign situation. M. Daladier scarcely said a word about Czecho-Slovakia and con-

fined himself to saying that the Government must be given unlimited plenary powers without a moment's delay, while M. Bonnet discreetly remained in the background and said nothing. In his famous broadcast some days later M. Daladier was very energetic, but the broadcast was almost entirely an answer to Mussolini. On Germany and Czecho-Slovakia and Poland hardly a word was said.

M. Daladier has received innumerable letters from all over France approving his firm stand in relation to Italy, and one has the impression that the French people are entirely in favor of the latest Chamberlain policy in relation to Poland, but one cannot be absolutely sure. It is curious that both M. Daladier and M. Bonnet have been lying low and have let Mr. Chamberlain do all the talking 'in the name of Britain and France.' The old gibe 'England will fight to the last French soldier' contains some dangerous propagandist possibilities, which may be successfully exploited in France if the question ever arises of 'helping Poland,' or 'helping Rumania.'

### III

If the intentions of the French Government often remain obscure, it is largely because there is no longer any regular Parliamentary Government in France. The Daladier Government has, within less than a year, secured plenary powers on three occasions, and its present powers are completely unlimited in scope and are valid for no less than eight months.

In asking for plenary powers last time M. Daladier showed a certain contempt for Parliament: 'This is not a time for words, but a time for

deeds,' and if anyone ventured to inquire about the scope of the powers, he had, to put it crudely, his nose bitten off by M. Daladier, who contemptuously dismissed any such questions as 'byzantinism.' 'Even with the enemy at the gates you will go on talking.'

Naturally, nobody raised the slightest objection to the plenary powers as far as military preparedness and all measures of defense were concerned, but it was strange to hear M. Daladier, a Radical-Socialist leader, advocate a system of 'democracy without contradictions'—a phrase curiously reminiscent of certain totalitarian formulas.

M. Daladier's task is a formidable one, and most people therefore make allowances for his desire for authority and for his occasional outbursts of bad humor. Although he is easily swayed by contradictory influences, it is felt that his instincts are sound, that his patriotism is above suspicion and that his manner can be impressive. Is he the strong man of France? Experience in the past showed that his strong-man manner could be deceptive. His brief Premiership in February, 1934, which ended with the famous Concorde riots, was a strange succession of 'strong' and 'weak' moments. The same is true of his whole attitude to the Czech crisis and Munich. On the night of Munich he was the unhappiest man in the world, yet he entered Paris in triumph. 'Strong Man' Daladier really came into existence on November 30, on the day when he broke the general strike. He broke it completely, and later he boasted of having personally ordered tear gas to be used against the stay-in strikers at Renault's; it gave him

great satisfaction to feel that he had acted without a moment's hesitation, and it gave him a large fund of self-confidence.

## IV

Daladier was a Front Populaire man; it was he who led the Radicals into the Front Populaire fold while many of them were still hesitating to join forces with the 'Reds.' He was War Minister in all the Front Populaire Governments since 1936, and he coöperated loyally with Blum. His conviction, in April, 1938, that the Front Populaire was played out and not worth going on with was sincere, and certainly reflected a mood that was widespread in the country, not least among the peasantry. And it is one of the remarkable features of the Daladier régime that, while marking a reaction against the working class (and the stay-in strikes certainly irritated the bulk of French public opinion), it is constantly courting the favors of the French peasantry. It resembles the Second Empire in this.

The recent financial decrees have let the peasantry off lightly, and Daladier misses no opportunity of flattering the peasantry; in December he remarked that the last war was won chiefly by the French peasants, and more recently he referred to the numerous letters he was getting 'from the very heart of the country' indicating that these peasant voices meant more to him than any opinions expressed in Parliament. M. Daladier, indeed, regards his rural mail as a barometer of what the country wants and as a daily source of political inspiration. And perhaps he believes at heart that his correspondents have more faith in him than in Parliamentary government.

Daladier is a man who has come to believe in his own mission; he has long ceased to be a party man and has come to believe in 'authority.' With such ideas he has inevitably been supported by all the conservative elements in France, and the Fascist elements are not unfriendly to him. He is hated by the Communists and disliked by the Socialists and by a part of his own fellow-Radicals, and he has not made himself any more popular with them by the rather startling methods he used in having President Lebrun reëlected.

The international situation is admittedly serious, but his critics sometimes wonder whether the gravity of the international situation is not being used as an excuse for certain innovations which, in spirit at least, are scarcely democratic—the demand for unlimited plenary powers and all the maneuvers that led to the reëlection of Lebrun by a reluctant National Assembly, which simply did not feel like making a fuss at a time like this. But the sudden hostility of M. Cailiaux and other senatorial guardians of the Constitution is an indication that if we escape a war there will be a reaction against the anti-Parliamentary tendencies of M. Daladier.

Nevertheless, it is felt that it is the wrong time for making rows, and the working class, with its sense and patriotism, feels it very keenly. There has been no outburst against the sudden increase of the 40-hour week to a 60-hour week in the war industries, and the C.G.T. (General Federation of Labor), which since the fiasco of the general strike is, admittedly, not in a strong bargaining position, has been satisfied with vague assurances that sacrifices would also be asked from the

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employers and M. Jouhaux has decided that the usual May Day stoppage should not apply this year. In the presence of the grave war menace France is today a more or less united country, but it cannot be said to be united around its Government. M. Daladier the War Minister has the country behind him, but M. Daladier the Premier has lately acted in a manner which has not failed to stir up much animosity among the political parties.

But as War Minister M. Daladier is generally trusted. Even in the days when he was 'a man of the Left' (but one who was determined to keep the Army outside politics) he was popular with the generals and the Army. He is on the best terms with General Gamelin. French opinion has the greatest confidence in the Army, and Daladier's position will be strong as long as he remains at the War Office, where he will continue to share some of the prestige of the French Army itself.

## II. PERMIT TO LIVE

By a SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Translated from the *Haagsche Post*, Hague Political Weekly

'CARTE D'IDENTITÉ'—a magic word—often the unattainable object of longing of the many thousands of emigrants living in Paris. Dreadful tragedies centering around the little green card have taken place within the last few years. The Paris police chronicle records many a suicide as the result of the final refusal to issue this blessed little piece of paper. Whoever moves among emigrants knows that all the thoughts of these people revolve around it—more, perhaps, than around their daily bread.

The refugee problem in France has entered a new phase. The Spanish collapse has brought into the country another wave of emigration, adding 400,000 more to the army of political refugees which had already reached the million mark. It no longer is a political problem; it has become a social problem of the first order. It has reached the limits where tolerance and hospitality stop and the country has to think of its own security. For

this reason, the decrees regulating the permits of emigrants have been growing ever more stringent, creating a feeling of panic among the unfortunates who depend on them.

A few days ago I went to the Paris prefecture to see for myself what goes on in the anteroom of the department in charge of foreigners. The stairways and waiting rooms are overcrowded. Many people have waited for three days, going home only for a few hours at night and returning the next morning long before the doors are opened, in order to grab a low number. These people are calm: they have nothing to lose. Most of them have time because they have no jobs. Only very few foreigners may work in France. A *carte du travail* is even more difficult to obtain than a *carte d'identité*.

All eyes are turned toward the mysterious room from which from time to time an official in a gray trenchcoat emerges, with a pile of folders under his arm. He calls out