

The Elections in France

The coming poll for local officials throughout the country finds ever-stronger sentiment for the Popular Front and for labor unity

By Paul Nizan

PARIS.

A FEW days after this issue goes to press, the voters of France will choose representatives for the General Councils (*Conseils Généraux*) throughout the country. The October 10 elections for the departmental governing bodies of France have always been of considerable importance in the nation's politics. Though the personality of the individual candidate is more important here in these elections than in those for the Chamber of Deputies, the election constitutes, without doubt, a major consultation of French public opinion. And let it be added that the general councilors are among the local functionaries who vote for senators; hence, any important shift in the composition of the local councils is afterwards reflected in the membership of the national upper house.

On all sides, there is agreement that the outlook favors a major victory by the Socialists and Communists as well as a considerable growth in the influence of the People's Front. In spite of the violent campaigns of the Right, in spite of the unquestionable uneasiness among the French masses themselves as a result of the policy of "pause" inaugurated by Léon Blum, and continued—if not made worse—by the decree laws of the Chaumet-Bonnet cabinet, the masses who sent the imposing majority of May 1936 into the Chamber of Deputies have no intention whatever of turning their backs on the People's Front. On the contrary. There is a definite impression that the state of mind of the average French voter "on the Left" can be summarized as follows: inasmuch as the program of the People's Front has not been carried through to completion, inasmuch as difficulties have been caused by the activities of the big bourgeoisie, the employers, and the fascist organizations, the People's Front must be given new forces which will enable it to carry out, despite all maneuvers, the mission for which it was founded.

There can be no talk of "profound disillusionment." The gains are being held, and foremost among these are the collective labor agreements, the vacations with pay, obligatory arbitration, and the machinery of the June social laws. These achievements have at least altered the social physiognomy of France.

On the other hand, it is clear that the Right is entering the election battle of October in a most desperate plight. The differences among the various fascist and reactionary organizations have never before reached such proportions. Each of the fascist chieftains is striving to outdistance his rivals. It is impossible to speak of a "united front" of reaction. Colonel François-Casimir de la Rocque, ex-

posed as having taken a cut out of the "secret funds budget" of the Tardieu and Laval cabinets, is violently attacked by the leaders of the royalist Action Française, Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, and is knifed by the Führer of the so-called French People's Party, Jacques Doriot. M. Henri de Kerillis, the chief journalistic spokesman of reaction, who during recent years has been one of the organizers of the election campaign of the Right, has declared that his side has never gone into the struggle in worse condition.

Consequently, there is every reason to expect a smashing victory of the candidates of the various parties, the People's Front, Radicals, Socialists, and Communists.

It now appears that the question of infusion of new strength into the policy of the People's Front in the domestic and foreign fields will be raised soon after the election. At this moment there can be no doubt that the most important single political factor will be the policy of the Communist Party. The position taken until now by this party, which for more than a year has been the driving force of the People's Front, is well-known. Contrary to the position of certain Socialist theorists, the Communist Party does not at all consider that it is necessary to proceed to "reforms of structure" which would transform more or less profoundly the economic structure of the country. It in no wise fears these reforms, and there is no reform which is too daring for it. But it forcefully states that before all else there is the common program of the People's Front, that not every section of this program has been carried out in practice, and what matters most before speaking of new stages is to carry through this present program. The Communist Party believes that the factor which would be of most powerful aid in achieving the fulfillment of this political ambition would be the reestablishment of the political unity of the working class. I do not think it can be doubted that the question of

unity is due to emerge as the new factor which this autumn will be capable of bringing about further changes in the political life of France.

At the last meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of France (a Central Committee meeting which demonstrated with astounding force the solidity of the Communist Party, its single-minded viewpoint, and its comradeship), Maurice Thorez, the party's general secretary, placed the accent on the Communists' desire for unity. Proposals were made to the Socialists who rejected them after a month of reflection. These proposals accepted the basis for unity laid down by the Socialist congress held at Marseilles about ten days before this session of the Central Committee: inner democracy in the united party, sovereignty of the national congress and of the congress of whatever international the unified party should affiliate with—nothing that the Communists could not accept. In their anxiety to effect unity, the Communists proposed that immediately, at every level within both parties, the members of both the Socialist and Communist organizations should begin to meet and work together. This proposal was categorically rejected by the Socialists. Paul Faure, general secretary of the Socialist Party (S.F.I.O., as it is known in France), in a letter to the Communist Central Committee, reiterated that the Socialists conceived of the preparations for unity only as conversations between the leading bodies of both parties. Jacques Duclos, secretary of the Communist Party, replied that he noted this decision of the Socialist Party with regret, but that he hoped a meeting of the Unification Commission of the two parties would be held in the very near future. It is clear that the slogan of unity launched by the Communists is meeting fervent and profound support among the masses of the workers, and that it will play a major role in the election campaign. It is no less clear that a good number of Socialist leaders are striving and will continue to strive to put a brake on the movement toward unity.

I do not believe there is reason for pessimism. For three years the Communist Party has proved itself the possessor of a persistency and political firmness which give ground for the best of hopes. These hopes, this desire, on the other hand, express far too well the ardent aspirations of the French working people to allow the possibility of disappointment.

It goes without saying that the formation of the united party of the working class would be a factor capable of bringing about a profound metamorphosis in the conditions of political life in France.



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How to Boycott Japan

WE have received numerous inquiries for further information on the effects of a possible embargo and boycott by the United States against Japan. The United States is the most important single exporter to and importer from Japan. Combined with similar action by the British empire, a boycott and embargo would be crushing. Somewhat more than 50 percent of Japan's total imports come from these two powers while somewhat less than the same percentage of Japan's total exports go to these two powers.

Considering the United States alone, a popular boycott would be extremely effective if it were based on only a few products. Japan's most important export commodity to the United States is raw silk. This country took 85 percent of Japan's total export of raw silk in 1936. If Japan cannot sell raw silk, her ability to buy raw cotton, oil, scrap iron, and the like becomes critically impaired. Other important exports to the United States, in the order of their approximate importance, are: china and porcelain ware (tableware, kitchenware, etc.); tea; crab meat (sauce and paste); tuna fish; earthenware, crockery, and stoneware; perilla oil; silk-woven fabrics; pyrethrum or insect powder; and toys.

A boycott of these ten products, especially the first five, would seriously dislocate Japanese economy within perhaps three to six months. The chief American exports to Japan, all of which would come within any official embargo or economic sanctions, are equally crucial to the effective functioning of Japan's war economy. The most important exports are raw cotton, oil, scrap iron, wood pulp, and various finished manufactures. Japan gets practically all of its automobiles, trucks, and buses from the Ford and General Motors companies. Machinery and parts are also mainly supplied by the United States.

It may not be easy to spot Japanese products in some cases, owing either to deliberate falsification by Japanese manufacturers in stamping the place of origin upon their products, or to the fact that the import has been

transformed in the process of making the finished product. For the sake of greater simplicity in spreading the boycott against Japanese goods, it is enough to remember the following five, generally easily-identified products: silk (in any form), tea, pottery, toys, and such canned goods as tuna and crab meat.

The Issues at Denver

THE big question as the A. F. of L. convened at Denver was whether the reactionary top leadership would challenge rank-and-file disapproval by insisting on expelling the C.I.O. unions now suspended. Green, Frey, and the rest have moved to make the break final by expulsion, but pressure from below for unity may still convince them that it is safer to maintain the status quo formally, while continuing their destructive splitting tactics of the past year.

The recent convention of the Amalgamated Association of Street, Electrical Railway, & Motor Coach Employees at San Francisco typifies the sort of progressive opinion that Green dare not altogether ignore. Besides recommending a change in the laws of the American Federation of Labor, which would end the raiding of industrial unions by reactionary craft union officials, a resolution included this statement:

However, we believe that the policies of our labor movement, as directed by the A. F. of L., should progress and in order to progress it must change its form of organization from time to time to meet the changed industrial conditions of the world.

It is no accident, either, that leaders of two Federation departments, the building trades and the metal trades, found themselves in hot jurisdictional disputes just prior to the Denver convention. Trouble was brewing among nineteen unions in the building trades where a group of seven unions led by William D. Hutcheson of the Carpenters' Brotherhood opposed twelve smaller unions. The highly skilled crafts fought the election of two department officers from what they regarded as the inferior laborers' group.

Several other highly important issues are sure to come up at Denver. The first is the organizing of the millions of unorganized. It is hard to see how Green can hit upon an effective policy of organizing these unorganized, which does not lead in the direction of C.I.O. Developments at home and abroad have put progressive political action and a realistic stand in regard to peace on labor's "must" list. But at Denver all signs point to a continuation of the Gompers "non-partisan" policy on political action and an ostrich attitude of pure isolationism in regard to the fascist threat of world war.

Every one of the major issues that confront delegates to this A. F. of L. convention goes far beyond the every-day concerns of organized labor. On each of these issues progressive militant forces are ranged against reaction. With the Atlantic City conference of the C.I.O. beginning October 11, workers the country over will be able to make immediate comparisons and decisions as to which kind of leadership and program represents the real interests of American labor.

Progressive Pulse

WE hope the President was exhilarated, as we were, at the progressive sentiment shown all along his pulse-taking northwest passage. How progressive it was can be judged by the fact that it remained the focus of news in a press all too reluctant to report it.

The facts were obvious. Correspondents on the presidential special learned that, so far as immediate public reaction was concerned, the reactionary clan drew a blank in sensationalizing Justice Hugo Black's former membership in the Ku Klux Klan. The reporters also saw for themselves that farmers want more instead of less relief, especially price stabilization. And that not only the people but also their local politicians feel the continuing urgency of federal responsibility toward the unemployed. At the Bonneville Dam a New York Times man naively noticed that "the President's promise of wide distribution of the power, however disheartening it might have been to the public utility people and their supporters, was deemed certain to win renewed acclaim for the President from the Northwest as a whole."

However, emphasis was not placed on these specific public demands—progressive demands—but on the "hold" the President still has on the people. That, being vague, is easier for a reactionary press to interpret to suit itself. That could be dispensed with under the mystical hocus-pocus of the President's personality, his reckless bounty with public funds.

Thus the interpreters obscured the most significant point: Roosevelt's popularity stands up in the face of a historic press and congressional campaign against him as the personification of elemental rights of labor and of judicial reform. Throughout that campaign the same press bludgeoned Washington politicians with warnings that the President was moving too fast to suit the people "back home." Now we have heard from these people in four key states—territory traditionally progressive, it is true, but predominantly agrarian. We have heard something for the Hershey vigilante-organizers and other would-be drivers of a wedge between workers