

World Socialism

THE PEOPLE'S FRONT IN FRANCE

By HERBERT ZAM

IF ONE weren't dealing with such a serious matter as the People's Front of France, one would be tempted to say of its recently adopted Program (American Socialist Monthly, March issue), "The mountain labored and gave birth to a mouse." For after all the hopes which the formation of the People's Front raised, after the splendid anti-fascist demonstrations which it organized, after inspiring the unification of the trade union movement in France, after laying a basis for cooperation between Communists and Socialists, between workers and petty bourgeois, the program of the People's Front is the most disappointing document that has appeared in the international labor movement in many years.

It should endear the People's Front to the hearts of all the reformists, who have heretofore shied away from any favorable mention of this movement. As yet the activities of the People's Front are far better than its

French People's Front.

program, emphasizing the militant character of the rank and file of its supporters. But if the program becomes the guide for its activities, and if the revolutionary movement is to be confined to the limits of the program, then the entire movement can only lead the French proletariat into a blind alley, can only serve to disillusion them and make them ready victims for fascist demagoguery.

That this program is no ordinary document, but has particular significance is seen from the fact that Leon Blum, leader of the Socialist Party, describes it as the "program for the second ballot, the common program of the future majority, the program of the government." In other words, should the People's Front secure a majority, or close to a majority in the coming elections in France, an eventuality which seems very likely, it will organize a government and operate on the basis of this program. The communists tell us that a people's front government can serve as a transition to a pure proletarian or Socialist government. This program must therefore be looked upon as a transition to Socialism. Let us see:

In the first section, entitled "Political Demands" the most extreme point is the demand for the "recognition of women's right to work"! Even such a purely bourgeois democratic demand as the suffrage for women, one of the traditional demands of the Socialist Party, has been, for some strange reason, omitted. The only other political demand dealing with labor is the right to belong to trade unions (in which connection why no mention of the right to strike, to picket, to organize boycotts?)

The colonies receive attention: There is provision for the "setting up of a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry

Demand Colony Probe

into the political, economic and moral conditions in French territories overseas, and in particular in French North Africa and Indo-China!" This, proposal is seriously offered for the support of the French Socialist proletariat, which for many years has been insisting upon the complete liberation of the colonies. The inhabitants of the French colonies are to slave happily, knowing that in the near future it will be a People's Front commission which will "inquire" into their welfare.

The second half of the program is even more depressing than the first half, if that is possible. One looks in vain for even the word

"Socialism." One looks in vain for any mention of socialization of industries, of mines, of banks. The Bank of France is to be placed under government control, but its private ownership is to be retained. Actually two-thirds of this section deals with proposals for financial reforms, reforms so dear to the heart of the constantly scheming petty bourgeoisie.

In this connection we may point to a very significant section entitled: "Against the spoliation of those who save. For a better organization of credit." This is obviously intended for the consumption of the petty bourgeoisie, for what "savings" can the working class possibly have in the sixth year of the economic crisis?

There is a further demand for the "democratic reform (whatever that may mean—HZ) of the system of taxation along the lines of a reduction of taxes to give a stimulus to trade." Now what earthly interest can the proletariat have in the reduction of taxes in order to stimulate trade? Even the reformists in the past have insisted that they intended to gradually socialize industries by means of increasing taxation, but here we are told of the need for reducing taxation. An element of unconscious humor is provided by the demand "Regulations for the exercise of the profession of a banker." We are going to move forward to Socialism by prescribing rules for the conduct of bankers!

What has happened? How is it possible that two working class parties can adopt such a thoroughly bourgeois-minded program? The answer is not far to seek. This is the program of the Radicals, of Daladier, of Herriot, of Cot. From the moment the Radicals entered the People's Front, there began a gradual watering down of the proletarian character of its program. In order to keep the Radicals in, it was necessary to make more and more concessions to them, until nothing was left but the demands of the Radical Party. The People's Front, in reality, has become a parliamentary machine for carrying out the program of the Radical Party.

A government organized on the basis of this program, no matter how many Socialists and communists are in the cabinet, will be a Radical government, with the difference that the failure of such a government to accomplish anything substantial for the masses of the workers, and fail it must, as all petty bourgeois programs must fail in this era of finance imperialism, will weigh heavily on the shoulders of the proletarian parties, the Socialists and communists. The German proletariat had considerable experience with programs of this type, beginning with Hilferding's clever financial reforms and ending with Bruening's emergency financial decrees. The result of the accumulation of these programs, and the disillusionment of the working class with them was—Hitler.

We are not here discussing language or words. It is possible to have a program which is in essence a good Socialist program and not mention the term "Socialism." But it must point toward Socialism. It must take some basic measures on the road to Socialism. It must begin the work of reorganizing society. This program does not do so. It envisages nothing but some minor changes in the superficial features



The old stories of secret military world rearms. Chief among them Maurin, French minister

'New Leader

Norman Thomas' radio attack on Smith and Roosevelt has been answered. Here is the answer:

"The great mass of workers, farmers and middle class people who toil for a living in one way or another will judge the Roosevelt administration not on the basis of Thomas' theories concerning fascism and the collapse of capitalism, but on the basis of their own experiences and observations. It was on this basis that the convention of the United Mine Workers has just endorsed Roosevelt's New Deal and condemned the Liberty League. Thomas may assert a thousand times that Roosevelt's New Deal is fascism, but the miners know that the Guffey Bill has saved their union and averted a strike that might have been disastrous for their organization. The same may be said about the feeling of millions of farmers who were saved from bankruptcy by the legislation of the New Deal, and of millions of unemployed who have been taken out of the bread lines and soup kitchens by the New Deal's relief measures, however inadequate they seem to a Socialist. All these elements judge the New Deal on the basis of their own experience, not on somebody's theories."

With these words, a former Socialist newspaper, the New Leader, tosses its hat in the air for the Roosevelt administration. The United States, says the author, Harry Rogoff, in the New Leader of February 15, is "in a much sounder condition, from a general economic point of view, than they were a year or two ago." And indeed, "the New Deal has diminished the numbers of the hungry and the homeless, of the desperate and the impoverished, of the ruined and the embittered."

The only step that remains for the New Leader and the ex-Socialists of the Old Guard is to print up their leaflets with the slogan, "Vote for the New Deal." They have begun their chorus of "Roosevelt is our leader."

In all fairness, it should be added that the Old Guard thinks that Roosevelt should be pushed "further to the left." Says Rogoff: "We want to widen the gulf between Roosevelt and Smith, between the New Deal and the Liberty League."

The New Leader becomes New Dealer!

The Rogoff article makes plain what we have charged for a long time. The Old Guard has definitely broken with the tradition of the Socialist movement. It is ready to support and even now

of the capitalist system, leaving the basic structure of capitalism unchanged. Such a program is not and cannot be a transition toward Socialism. It is a substitute for Socialism.