

CHAPTER TWO

THE APPEALS OF COMMUNISM IN FRANCE

As the importance of French communism to Moscow rests in part upon the widespread appeal of the PCF within France, it is important to understand that appeal. To do so we must return to the PCF's origins. For if the Communist Party of France in 1966 seemed to have lost much in common with the party born in December 1920 at the Congress of Tours, it nevertheless retained the marks of its ancestry.

In her extensive study, *Les origines du communisme français (1914-1920)*,¹ the historian Annie Kriegel, an old Communist militant notable for her "activity among the intellectuals," has described in great detail the period between the Congress of Tours and the beginning of the First World War. She concluded that the adherence of the overwhelming majority of the Socialist Party to the Third International in 1920 can be explained only by the concurrence of certain specific circumstances in the French labor movement—that is, the Socialist defeat in the election of November 1919, followed by the failure of the Syndicalist attempt at "total revolution" (the rail workers' strike), which was harshly suppressed in May 1920. Seeing their hopes shattered, the French Socialists could not but "discover" bolshevism, which had just overcome civil war and foreign intervention in Russia. Adherence to the Third International, and thus the establishment of a link with the victorious Russian Revolution, made it possible

to capture the dynamism and revolutionary energy of victorious bolshevism and inject it into French and European socialism, without absorbing everything which made bolshevism a specifically Russian product.²

In sum, for the French Socialists, adherence to the twenty-one conditions of the Communist International was to remain a formality.

¹ Annie Kriegel, *Les origines du communisme français* (2 vols.; Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1964).

² Introduction to Annie Kriegel, *Le Congrès de Tours* (Collection "Archives"; Paris: Julliard, 1964), p. 23.

Jaurèsism had inherited from radicalism the art of making divergent and often much more empirical practices coexist with the sacred texts, whereas for the Russian Bolsheviks the essential point was to capture the masses of the party and leave their bolshevization until later.

Moreover, the Russians, in turn, had no illusions; they knew that their new French recruits were not authentic bolsheviks. But in 1920 the leaders of the Soviet Union were uncertain about their global perspective:

If . . . the European revolution has a chance to win in short order, the entire bolshevik effort should concentrate on German socialism, which occupies a key position; . . . but if a long-term strategy is required, France will increase in importance. Since the distinction between victors and vanquished will gradually disappear, Germany might eventually crumble under a revolutionary push from the West just as well as from the East.³

This observation is all the more interesting because it throws some light on why the Soviet Communist Party and the Communist International came to consider the French Communist Party so important. While the German Communist Party was, in a certain sense, born under the banner of imminent revolution, engendered by the revolution and for the revolution, the French Communist Party seemed destined from the beginning to play its role in the form of a "longer-term" strategy. From its inception it was, so to speak, the party of revolution for the day after tomorrow.

The reasons are historical. The period during which Thorez consolidated his power in the Communist Party of France coincided with the first Five-Year Plan, the liquidation of the German Communist Party, and the triumph of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. (The year 1934 ended with Kirov's assassination, which ushered in the era of the great trials.) From 1934 on, the proletarian revolution and the conquest of political power disappeared as aims from the programs of Western European Communist parties. In France the leading group around Maurice Thorez, the survivors of which are Jacques Duclos, Benoît Frachon, and two defectors from the "Barbé-Célor" group, Raymond Guyot and François Billoux (as well as Étienne Fajon and Waldeck Rochet, who joined later), had been trained in the practice of revolutionary gesturing. The PCF grew and attained its greatest power as well as its national and international prestige, however, through the practice of a united front strategy that included a large part of the bourgeoisie, a line

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

carried out so well that by 1936 the Communist Party had managed to outflank the Socialists on the latter's right. For this strategy it had the blessings of the Comintern, at whose Seventh Congress in August 1935 the French section had been held up as a shining example to all other members—this time without the slightest hint of criticism in the eulogy—and Thorez was given a long ovation.⁴

The profoundly significant triumph of the French Communist Party at the Seventh Comintern Congress was soon followed by popular front victories at the polls in France; for a very long period the Communist movement renounced all revolutionary perspective in the highly developed industrial countries. The parties born in the wake and under the influence of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 first organized to prepare for the world revolution and entered the political game in the bourgeois countries under the label of antifascism. Even though this new strategy was inspired primarily by concern about the defense of that fortress of socialism, the Soviet state, it could not fail to have deep repercussions within these parties. From 1935 on, with regard to one entire sector of its activities, the French Communist Party no longer differed from a reformist party.

It can therefore be said that the PCF entered its period of maturity, and Thorez entered fully into Stalin's good graces, during a period of retreat on the part of the world revolutionary forces—a retreat epitomized by the disintegration of the German Communist Party. Like Stalin's triumph in the Soviet Union, Thorez' rise in France was closely tied to the receding of the revolutionary wave. When in 1936 France was again hit with a wave of sit-down strikes, Thorez did not hesitate to place his full authority in the service of "appeasement": "One should know how to end a strike," "not everything is possible," "communism will not arrive in France tonight or even tomorrow morning"—these were the answers Thorez gave to workers who were not content with the Matignon agreements.⁵

⁴ Leon Trotsky, in his *Journal d'exil—1935* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 49, wrote on February 14, 1935:

What goes by the name of "popular front"—that is, the radical bloc in favor of parliamentary struggle—is the most bastardly betrayal of the people ever to be sanctioned by the workers' parties since the war. [Editor's translation.] See also Trotsky, *Écrits 1928-1940* (Paris: Publications de la Quatrième Internationale), Vol. II, *Où va la France?*, and Vol. III, *La Tragédie de la classe ouvrière allemande—La révolution espagnole*.

⁵ The Matignon agreements, signed on the night of June 7-8, 1936 by the delegations of the reunited CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) and the Conseil National du Patronat Français, covered in particular a general increase in wages and the establishment of joint methods of procedure.

Thus in 1936 the Communist Party of France attained its quasi-definitive form. After a flirtation with Trotsky,⁶ Maurice Thorez, formerly a sectarian, had shown great astuteness in adapting himself to the Stalinist line by turning around and declaring himself (with the blessing of the Soviets) a pillar of bourgeois democratic society.

However, it is the fact that communism took root in French political reality which is of interest to us. How did this happen? The success of French communism has been largely due to the ability with which it has been able profitably to assimilate certain traditions of the French labor movement: the revolutionary tradition of anarchosyndicalism, the parliamentary tradition of Jaurèsian socialism, the internationalist tradition, and the Jacobin tradition—that is, the patriotism, in both its chauvinist and centralizing aspects, passed on by the petite bourgeoisie to the labor movement.

Thus every year the party commemorates not only the massacre of the Communards at the Mur des Fédérés in 1871 but also the assassination of that great Socialist Jean Jaurès in 1914. It commemorates July 14, 1789 and November 11, 1918—and even the feast day of Joan of Arc, which before the Second World War was traditionally a holiday of the extreme right. Tied organically by its origins to the multiple traditions that nourished the French labor movement itself, the Communist Party rooted itself in French national consciousness. Without ceasing to declare itself the champion of proletarian internationalism, it has played upon traditional French chauvinist emotions after 1941 with its “anti-Boche” policy and, after 1947, its anti-American propaganda.

These various traditions, extremely contradictory in themselves, existed side by side during the first years of the Communist Party's existence, though not always peaceably. Thorez' accomplishment was to fuse them by sterilizing them. The resulting amalgam has existed long enough to be considered by now a Thorezian or Stalinist tradition.

⁶ In his *La révolution prolétarienne*, written before the war, Boris Souvarine published letters written by Maurice Thorez in 1924, during a period when, as a Trotskyite sympathizer, he had distributed copies of Trotsky's pamphlet *Cours Nouveau* (see *Le Figaro*, Dec. 8, 1961). (After Liberation Thorez' letters were reprinted in *Est & Ouest*.) But as soon as Thorez realized that Trotsky had lost the game, he decided to adhere to the most rigid Stalinist obedience. Togliatti, on the other hand, compromised himself seriously with Bukharin. (See the correspondence between Togliatti, alias Ercoli, and Jules Humbert-Droz, then secretary of the Communist International, in J. Humbert-Droz, “*L'Oeil de Moscou*” à Paris, [Collection “Archives”; Paris: Julliard; 1964], especially pp. 242-250, and Giulio Seniga, *Togliatti e Stalin* [Milan: Sugar, 1961], pp. 8 and 25).

In analyzing this process one must keep in mind how great the weight of tradition is and how particularly heavy it is in France, where, to use Marxist language, the ideological and political superstructures reflect the comparative slowness of social evolution during the last century, the strong resistance to change with regard to certain methods of production, economic organization, and the persistence of anachronistic institutions such as dispersed small industry, disorganized distribution machinery, and a fragmented agriculture that permits a near marginal farmer to live or, rather, to vegetate. In fact, the superstructures inherited from the past sometimes persist with great vigor, even though the economic and social context that gave rise to them has undergone a profound transformation.

For these reasons, "pure" sociology is incapable of explaining the geographical distribution of political currents in France. Why did the Nord and the Pas-de-Calais remain strongholds of the Socialist Party when that party was very weak in industrialized Lorraine, Paris, or Lyon? Why is the Communist Party so powerful in the rural areas where small proprietors dominate (some departments in the Center, Southeast, and Midi), while other rural regions, sometimes poorer and more open to economic evolution and ready to question their archaic and paralyzing social structures, still incline toward the right? (This is the case, typically, in western Brittany.) The weight of the past—the republican and anticlerical tradition in one area, the battles of the Maquis elsewhere, or, in contrast, the hold of the Catholic Church—is often decisive.⁷

We are not dealing here with a specifically rural phenomenon. The same seeming lack of pattern can be found in the cities. Communist influence, very considerable in Marseilles, Nice, Le Havre, Nîmes, and Béziers, all cities very unequally industrialized, is small in Bordeaux or Rennes, and insignificant in Metz, Mulhouse, and Strasbourg.

Many sociologists, economists, and political observers tend to believe that the changes in French society after World War II—a better living standard for the working class; full and almost permanent employment; higher wages for still insufficient numbers of skilled workers; disappearance of hunger, unemployment, very low

⁷ From the extensive literature on the geography and sociology of elections, see Jacques Fauvet, *Les forces politiques en France* (Paris: Éditions "Le Monde," 1951), and *La politique et les paysans* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1958). See also François Goguel, *La politique des partis sous la IIIème République* (2 vols.; Paris, 1946); André Siegfried, *Tableau des partis en France* (Paris, 1930).

salaries, and flagrant injustices; the development of employment guarantees and a system of social security; a massive increase in the consumption of durable goods, financed by consumer credit; growth of the number of cadres, technicians, and altogether of the "third" sector; the emergence of a certain planning of the national economy, contrasting with the liberalism associated with the memory of crises and depressions—should have had the effect of reducing the role of the French Communist Party, with its "Stalinist" profile sculptured by Thorez.⁸ But even if such reasoning might apply in the long run, the error frequently committed has been to underestimate the capacity of the French Communist Party to adapt itself to a changing situation.

For example, immediately after the very serious 1958 electoral defeat suffered by the French Communist Party many commentators pointed out that Communist losses had been even greater in urban and working-class centers than in certain of its rural strongholds in the center and south of France. To move from such evidence to the conclusion that the French Communist Party was condemned to decline quickly in advanced industrialized zones and expanding regions, and would maintain itself well only in backward and marginal regions, was only one step.

It became clear later that this way of looking at things was too simple. In the course of subsequent elections the French Communist Party made a very good recovery, and even new gains, in industrial centers.⁹ In 1958 the Communist electorate had complained bitterly about the defeat suffered several months before, when their party had not been able to prevent de Gaulle from coming to power. The urban electorate had supported de Gaulle. Yet in 1962, by adjusting its propaganda and its actions to the new situation and by concentrating on strategic points where it seemed in danger of losing power, the French Communist Party regained most of its traditional bastions.

The real point is that the French Communist Party as an electoral movement is very complex. Some vote for it from a "Leninist"

⁸ This was primarily the viewpoint defended by Serge Mallet in *France-Observateur*, 1958–1959. (For a more subtly argued opposition to this position, see Alain Touraine, "Une classe ouvrière en devenir," *Arguments*, No. 12–13 [Jan.–Feb.–Mar. 1959], pp. 15–21.) Analyses of this sort played a considerable part in encouraging the formation of the Parti Socialiste Unifié, which for a long time had hopes of winning over what it called the "new classes" created by the evolution of modern capitalist society.

⁹ See the Appendix for a comparative table of the PCF's election returns.

position, with the intention of sending deputies to Parliament who will use it as a platform to reflect mass movements; others vote for it simply to demonstrate that they belong to the working class, in contrast to the bourgeoisie; others vote for the largest opposition party to express their dissatisfaction; still others vote for it out of solidarity with the poor, even though they themselves are financially secure. Finally, some vote for the PCF under the influence of the party's daily propaganda; that is, they vote for those who defend the claims of one or another category of citizens, for the defense of national independence, "against revanchist Germany," or "against the Americans."

In the majority of cases, however, what determines why people vote Communist is that a vote for the PCF is a vote for the party furthest to the left; whether it is an act of faith, subversion, or simply protest, those who vote Communist have the feeling that it is simply impossible to vote otherwise.

Thus the Communist Party, the "inheriting" party par excellence, has succeeded largely through the efforts of Maurice Thorez in absorbing the most diverse and even the most contradictory legacies.¹⁰ For example, exploiting the old adage of "the struggle of the little fellows against the big fellows," the PCF has been able to pose as the relentless defender of the small agricultural, commercial, or even industrial proprietor, ready to support demands for prices and profit margins contrary to the interests of the wage earners. With the help of the parliamentary system, the PCF has thus been able to make itself the representative of all those who hold to these diverse traditions.

As a result of the representative nature it acquired, the French

¹⁰ A striking manifestation of how tradition will survive, underground as it were, may be seen in reading over the principal speeches delivered at the Congress of Tours (in Annie Kriegel, *op. cit.*). Each speaker (including the minority who were opposed to joining the Third International, as well as those who represented various majority opinions) continued not only to pursue the objectives appropriate to his position but also to refer to his particular standards and heroes. Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès were, in turn, invoked by the "rightists," Marcel Sembat and Léon Blum, and the majority supporters, Marcel Cachin and Ludovic-Oscar Frossard. Each, however, brandished *his* Guesde and *his* Jaurès. Marcel Cachin's Guesde was the Marxist theoretician who advocated the revolutionary conquest of political power by the proletariat, while Marcel Sembat's Guesde pledged the socialists to "rally 'round the flag"; this Guesde would have participated in the government in August 1914 under the slogan of national defense. The confusion was all the greater since Cachin and Frossard, who advocated joining the Third International, did not lessen their efforts to justify the patriotic positions they had adopted during World War I.

Communist Party became a genuine political institution¹¹ even in the eyes of its opponents. In a way, its role has become similar to that of the second party in two-party regimes. Its leadership is the "shadow cabinet," its machinery the possible replacement and reserve in case of accident. But, on the other hand, the PCF has differed from parties that play a comparable role in two-party systems because, at least until the beginning of the sixties, it was based on a centralized structure not only on the national level but, more important, on the international level as well. This structure is, in turn, supported by two myths, very strong in France, that give it a much greater force than that of any other party machine: the myth of the Soviet Union, based in part upon the cult of Stalin, and the myth of organization.

Although the myth of the Soviet Union was based on the tradition of internationalism, the myth distorted and transformed that tradition, for internationalism had become entirely confused with attachment to the Soviet Union; that is, internationalism had been reduced to support for Moscow. For the French Communists, internationalism, crystallized and limited in this attachment to the Soviet Union, became a matter of faith rather than a principle inspiring concrete actions. For example, despite the power of its Communist party, France was one of the few European countries where protests against the Anglo-French-Israeli expedition against the Suez Canal remained purely verbal, without ever being expressed in the streets. But on November 7, 1956, that is, at the same time, the Communist party succeeded in the course of a few hours in mobilizing the majority of its Paris militants to answer the attack of extreme rightists who, in the wake of a demonstration of solidarity with the Hungarians crushed by the Red Army, had set fire to the offices of the Communist Party and its paper, *L'Humanité*. To be sure, the reflex of self-defense had played its part, but the remarkable fact remains that despite the general unpopularity of the Soviet intervention in Hungary (doubts assailed even the ranks of Communist workers, at least during the few days that followed the event, when Soviet tanks fired on the workers of Budapest) the French Communist Party selected this occasion for its "reassessment," after a period of vacillation. As a result of the circumstances in which it took place, this demonstration became a manifestation of support for the Soviet Union in the very domain where the

¹¹ Serge Mallet has often used the expression *poujadisme* to describe the PCF's systematic defense of its demands.

latter's action had profoundly trouble many of its most faithful defenders.¹²

Seen from a certain angle, an analogy comes to mind between the fanaticism with which the French Communists have always defended the Soviet Union against all "calumnies" and the attitude of integralist Catholics, who represented a minority sect in France (but always a very dynamic and powerful one) and who confound the catholicity of the Church with an absolute cult of the Papacy. In France as in Italy, the Communist Party has been the only one to offer those dechristianized elements of the working classes who were still unconsciously religious an ersatz for the Church that they had left in the form of Communist myths and organization.

The Communist church has its popularized Marxist dogmas, within easy reach of all in the form of a work such as *Fils du peuple*, the autobiography of Maurice Thorez. This is more readily available than the sacred texts of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, of which most people knew only a few sentences they had learned by heart. It has its saints, its martyrs, its ceremonies, its rites, its priests who belonged to a rigid hierarchy, its vocabulary of initiation, its more or less practicing members,¹³—all of which have been inextricably tied to the cult of Stalin, which appeared very early in France. In his message to the Sixteenth Congress of the CPSU (Bolshevik) in June 1930, Maurice Thorez was already expressing himself in these terms in the name of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party:

¹² The attack on party headquarters, in which a number of recently emigrated Hungarians participated, was a veritable godsend for the leaders of the PCF (most of whom were at the Soviet embassy when the raid occurred, attending a reception in honor of the thirty-ninth anniversary of the October Revolution). The "oppositionists" went so far as to suspect the Politburo of having arranged the demonstrations through the infiltration of *agents provocateurs* but were never able—for good reason—to find proof of or make public their accusations. The fact remains that party propaganda, starting with the allegation that Hungarians in France were protected by the fascists who set fire to the party's organizational headquarters, found the going easier when it asserted that the Hungarian uprising was inspired by fascists and reactionaries.

As an example of how the PCF's propaganda makes use of arguments totally extraneous to communism, the reader is referred to Léo Figuères, who wrote, in *L'Humanité-Dimanche*, that the Hungarian attitude was not surprising in view of the fact that Hungary had been an ally of Germany—in 1914–1918 and 1939–1940. Likewise, in order to present in an acceptable fashion to party militants the suppression of the workers in East Berlin in June 1953, the PCF counted on an "anti-Boche" chauvinism; the riots were held to be the work of Nazi revanchists.

¹³ For the "religious" aspect of the Communist Party, see Fauvet, *Les forces politiques en France*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–16.

We greet Comrade Stalin, the foremost fighter of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and assure him of our deepest sympathy, arising from our gratitude for his merits as the chief of all Bolsheviks. . . . Long live the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its respected leader Comrade Stalin!¹⁴

It is possible to trace through the years the evolution of the tone used in the documents of the French Communist Party. On the eve of the Second World War, in a speech on January 21, 1939 at the National Conference of the French Communist Party at Gennevilliers, Maurice Thorez spoke of Stalin as "the friend and continuator of Lenin," referred on several occasions to the "Leninist-Stalinist method" and to "the purity of the principles of the doctrine of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin," and proclaimed "unshakable loyalty to our party, our International, and its leaders, Dimitrov and Stalin," celebrating the latter as "the heir of the Russian revolutionary workers' movement and also of the international workers' movement."¹⁵ The respected chief of 1930 had taken on the rank of theoretician, the equal of the greatest; and "profound sympathy" had become "unshakable loyalty."

This cult reached its culmination during the years of the Cold War (1947-1952). Without exaggeration, it would take a whole book to reproduce the eulogies to Stalin found in the texts of the French Communist Party during that period.

How profoundly this cult influenced the PCF may be seen in the fact that more than a year after Stalin's death, when the French Communist leaders could no longer ignore the trend in the Soviet Union toward de-Stalinization, Jacques Duclos opened the Eighth Congress of the French Communist Party (at Ivry, June 3-7, 1954) by

evoking, at the threshold of our labors, the exceptional life and work of this prestigious architect of communism, this master of socialism, whose lessons inspire and guide us in our struggles."

Next Duclos asked for a "minute of silence in memory of our great Comrade Stalin."¹⁶

¹⁴ *La Correspondence Internationale*, No. 66 (Aug. 6, 1930), reprinted from *Oeuvres de Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1950), Book II, Vol. I, pp. 40, 43. See the report on the Central Committee meeting of December 5-7, 1952, at Gennevilliers in *Cahiers du Communisme*, Jan. 1953.

¹⁵ "Discours de Maurice Thorez à la Conférence nationale du P.C.F. 21-22-23 janvier 1939 à Gennevilliers," *La brochure populaire*, No. 94, pp. 3, 25-26.

¹⁶ "Pour le changement de la politique française, pour l'indépendance nationale et la paix," report on the activity of the Central Committee of the PCF, presented by Jacques Duclos, PCF pamphlet, p. 2.

Yet French communism has another face, complementary to and inseparable from its transcendental aspect. Communism remains close to the people, as did the Church in the early period of Christianity. It listens to the murmurs of the dissatisfied masses. For the French sympathizer communism is represented not only by the far-away and marvelous Kremlin, the Red Vatican, or the majestic and somber Paris headquarters of the Central Committee, which resemble an austere bishop's seat installed in the building of an insurance company. Communism is at the same time embodied in the person of the activist, who within the working-class milieu plays something akin to the role of the country priest in old Catholic rural society. He may be the trade union delegate of the Régie Renault or Electricité de France, attentive to the daily preoccupations of the workers, devoted to the defense of the small demands of his comrades, whether they concern salaries, working hours, the distribution of clothes, vacations, or some professional injustice.

For many workers who are not party members, this militant Communist is a strange person, a little irritating, a man who sometimes speaks an incomprehensible language and who devotes his spare time to inexplicable rites, but also the man who devotes himself to others, who defends them, who speaks in their name. Projected to the national level, this image of Communists at the factory level becomes the image of the party.

The myth of organization, without which the edifice constructed by the Communist Party would remain quite shaky, was, undoubtedly, the most difficult to introduce into the French labor movement. Under the pretext of safeguarding the unity of the workers' ranks in the class struggle, it demands respect for strict discipline and an organizational structure within which political decisions are taken at the summit and passed on to the lower levels. Leaders at all levels are infallible, at least as long as the higher echelon has not authorized criticism of them.¹⁷

This military-type organization was only reluctantly accepted because revolutionary syndicalism, which had provided bolshevism with its first converts in France, was steeped in libertarian tenden-

¹⁷ Thus no party member dared raise any objection to the often brutal methods employed by André Marty in his capacity as secretary of the PCF. But when Marty was arraigned by the Politburo in 1952, the party militants who had been the butts of his humorous sallies brought up their grievances, in some cases retained for years, at cell meetings, sectional meetings, etc. Marty's collaborators, Léon Feix, Jacques Kahn, André Voguet, *et al.*, found themselves free at last to discharge the animosity accumulated against their former patron during long months of working together.

cies. In order to impose its myth of organization, the French Communist Party had to rely on contrasting tendencies of petit bourgeois origin: the French taste for militarism, a remnant of the great epoch of the French Army; and a leaning toward Bonapartism, which found expression on several occasions in modern France—in particular during the time of Napoleon III and General Boulanger—and which even today prevents the PCF from openly attacking General de Gaulle.

Despite the difficulties of the task, the PCF's leadership under the command of Maurice Thorez has fully succeeded in this respect. The current still called "anarchosyndicalist" persists in the form of an inclination or leaning, but it has been emptied of all substance. It is no longer represented in the leadership of the movement. The term "*anar*" has become synonymous with lack of discipline, hot-headedness, lack of conscience and political education, and it is customary to make fun of it indulgently. On great occasions these *anars* reappear; they are invited to attend meetings and demonstrations of the party, to vote, to go out into the streets. Some representatives of this species may still be found among the party activists at the lowest level; their dynamism and their combativeness are exhausted there in skirmishes. When there is a strike or demonstration, accompanied by clashes with the police, they are in the forefront.

These "anarchosyndicalist" types still represent considerable numerical force, but only potentially; their aversion to any form of organization prevents them from playing an active role in party life. Thus, many workers who will vote Communist and follow the directives of the CGT manifest their disagreement with the Communist myth of organization by refusing to join the party (and the trade unions as well). However, they are *de facto* supporters of party and union organization, for they vigorously oppose any effort that might lead to weakening the organization of the working class.

At the same time as it imposes in practice its authority on the workers, even though they are repelled by its authoritarian methods, the PCF commands the respect of its bourgeois enemies. In periods when the regime is shaky, this organization alone is capable of disciplining the movement of the masses and making them return to law and order. We have mentioned Maurice Thorez' role in the strikes of 1936. In his memoirs,¹⁸ de Gaulle has explained why he asked five Communists, among them Thorez, to participate in his government of November 21, 1945:

¹⁸ Charles de Gaulle, *Le Salut* (Paris: Plon, 1959), Vol. III, p. 276.

I did it on the basis of my judgment that at least for some time their rallying under my control could serve social peace, of which the country was in such great need.

An anecdote told by a Communist militant admirably illustrates the image of the French Communist Party held by circles far removed from Communist sympathies. This activist had been asked, along with some of his comrades, to represent the Communist list in a voting place in Paris on election day. After the closing of the polls, he had been discussing in a café the events of the day with some policemen in civilian clothes who, like the Communist delegates, had watched the election operations from morning until evening. Not hiding his admiration, the policeman said: "After all, there are only two administrations in France that work: yours and ours." The police and the Communist Party!

Let us add that a very long period of legality has made their task easier for the leaders of the French Communist Party. Even during times when the party was effectively isolated, it was not really ostracized by French society. Whether it was from 1920 to 1934 or from 1947 to 1952, its isolation was only relative; the channels of communication with the external world and the ties between certain militant Communists and the rest of society were never really completely cut. The PCF's one period of complete isolation and clandestine existence was very short: it lasted from September 1939 to June 1941, from the declaration of war to the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler. This was actually the most difficult period in the party's history. In fact, the Nazi-Soviet pact had been badly received even in the ranks of the party itself, though the dismay was much greater at the base than at the summit. But this crisis left few lasting traces, except for a bad conscience on the part of the leaders which still existed twenty-five years later, for the massive participation of the French Communist Party in the Resistance during the following three years allowed it to recover and surpass what it had lost during the first eighteen months of the war.

To sum up, of those five years of illegal existence the PCF was really completely outside the law for only less than two years. The contrast with the Italian Communist Party, which was forced by fascism to exist as a clandestine organization from 1926 to 1943, must be emphasized.