

'Growing unrest in France and Italy' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (22 November 1947)

Caption: On 22 November 1947, the Bavarian newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung covers the riots and strikes paralysing France and Italy and analyses the role played by the Italian and French Communist parties who stand accused of fomenting disorder in order to gain power.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. FRIEDMANN, Werner; GOLDSCHAGG, Edmund; SCHÖNINGH, Dr. Franz Joseph; SCHWINGENSTEIN, August. 22.11.1947, n° 98; 3. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Wachsende Unruhen in Frankreich und Italien", p. 1.

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Communist advance in Western Europe

Growing unrest in France and Italy

'Breakwater' role for Léon Blum and De Gasperi / Reinforcement of the French army

(SZ) The strikes and turmoil instigated by the Communists in France and Italy may no longer be considered as isolated incidents. They give the impression of a systematic approach. In the French Parliament, Léon Blum characterised this situation with the statement that international Communism had openly declared war on French democracy. In the same spirit, Cardinal Schuster, Archbishop of Milan, characterised the unrest in Italy as part of a previously established plan aimed at obstructing the Government's constructive efforts and at helping the Communists to gain power.

Paris (UP) – President Vincent Auriol has asked the now 75-year-old French Socialist leader, Léon Blum, to form a new French Government and to assume for the fourth time the post of Prime Minister. Blum had already held discussions with the Socialists, the People's Republicans (MRP), the independent right-wing party and Herriot's Radical Socialists about the formation of a centrist government of 'national security' with the aim of creating a 'third force' to act against both the Communists and de Gaulle's supporters. On the subject of Blum's government programme, Guy Mollet, the Socialist Party's Secretary-General, declared that he would propose only in a secret ballot the nationwide increase in salaries entailing an increase in the minimum wage, temporary blocking of accounts and wages, approximation of agricultural and industrial prices, introduction of fixed prices and strike decisions of the trade unions. A Blum Government would constitute the final chance for maintaining France's position in Europe.

Prime Minister Blum will ask the National Assembly for a vote of confidence on his government programme which, in accordance with the French Constitution, will have to be approved by an absolute majority of at least 310 votes. The Communists have already declared that they will continue their fight against a Blum Government in the same way as they did against the Ramadier Government. Well-informed circles estimate the new Prime Minister's chances of success at around 50 %. Political observers see as unlikely participation by Paul Reynaud in a Léon Blum Government, because Reynaud, an advocate of large-scale economic freedom, has already taken a stance against the government control proposed by Blum. In the context of a centrist cabinet including right-wing splinter groups, called the 'third force' by the French press, the former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Pierre Flandin, was considered a likely candidate for a government post. General de Gaulle severely rejected the existence of a third force between the Communists and his party, because no coalition or group could represent such a force. If Blum were to lose the vote of confidence, there remains the possibility of a government under the moderate right-wing former Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, or the Radical Socialist, Edouard Herriot, the President of the National Assembly.

According to Dena INS reports, the French Communist Party had appealed to the French people to unite in 'an action to accelerate the Communist Party's return to power'. As a countermeasure, Paul Ramadier, having resigned as Prime Minister, but still exercising his official duties, has, in a radio broadcast, exceptionally conscripted some of the class of 1947 recruits after the Government had been informed that the Communists were planning to mobilise their cells for the weekend. The army has thus been reinforced by 140 000 men.

The French railwaymen's union has decided to call a general strike if an immediate 20 % salary increase is not granted. The railway workers in Marseilles have already downed tools. 200 000 metal workers are on strike in Paris, and a general strike is expected in the Paris region. Coal mining in the country's north has come to a complete standstill. The French ports are also idle. The Government has reinforced troops in all regions and ordered them to carry out the most vital duties. All in all, more than half a million people are on strike in France.

Clashes in southern Italy

Rome (AP) – At a Christian-Democratic Party Congress in Naples, the Italian Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, accused the leader of the left-wing Socialists, Pietro Nenni, and the Communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, of serving a foreign power and provoking civil war. They had forgotten, he explained, that, while defending their beloved concept of the Internationale, they were still first and foremost Italians. He regarded the ‘Communist Manifesto’ against him as a declaration of war on the Government aimed at making Italy ready to storm the barricades of democracy. On the subject of the Communist rejection of the Marshall Plan, he claimed that they wanted to prevent it from giving Italy the aid it required for reconstruction. He rejected the accusation that his government was subservient to American imperialism and to the Vatican. According to UP reports, De Gasperi was holding talks with the Republican Party and the right-wing Socialists under Giuseppe Saragat on extending his one-party cabinet to strengthen it against the Communists.

Widespread unrest persists throughout the country. In the Province of Siena and in Bari, a general strike has been called; street fights broke out between demonstrators and police. In Apulia, where 2 000 farm workers are on strike, serious clashes occurred when the Communists tried to take over in three towns. Heavy infantry and police units are using armoured vehicles in the fight against the demonstrators. The turmoil has also spread to Livorno and Sicily. The situation has already been officially described as ‘total anarchy’.

As reported by the BBC, the Italian Socialist Party has rejected the request from its party leader, Mr Nenni that, during next year’s parliamentary elections, the party should continue to act in close cooperation with the Communists.