

Address given by Jacques Duclos (Strasbourg, 25–28 June 1947)


Caption: On the occasion of the 11th Congress of the French Communist Party (PCF) held in Strasbourg from 25 to 28 June 1947, Jacques Duclos, former Resistance fighter and Communist Vice-President of the French National Assembly, condemns the political instability and strikes affecting the country while emphasising the key role played by the Communists in the reconstruction of post-war France.

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Address given by Jacques Duclos to the XIth Congress of the French Communist Party (Strasbourg, 25–28 June 1947)

Following this splendid report by the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, none of our Party delegates present here today can fail to be convinced of the grave and serious nature of the current political situation.

Each of you will appreciate that we are witnessing a ferocious battle between the forces of reaction and the forces of democracy. Each of you will appreciate, too, that the difficulty for us and for the people of France lies in guessing which way the scales will tip in the end.

This battle will determine the independence of our country and, to some extent, the future of international democracy, because events here in France have profound repercussions beyond our own borders. The Communists have a leading role to play in this battle. The essential thing for us is to be fully committed to the national and international responsibilities incumbent upon our Party. Just as we were the determining factor in the struggle to free our country, our action has also been decisive in developing production since our homeland's liberation, and we must and shall be at the heart of the battle to stop the forces of reaction from leading our country down a retrograde path. (*Loud applause*)

The forces of reaction want revenge

It is a fact that the forces of reaction are rallying and pursuing a systematic campaign aimed at undoing all the social and political victories which our people have won. The men behind the trusts — traitors, all of them — the collaborators, yesterday's Pétainists, many of them metamorphosed into today's Gaullists, they would all like to reverse all the social victories that we have achieved. If we let them do it, there would be nothing left of these victories that the people have won. They would take back social security from us, they would take back pensions for older workers, they would take back trade union rights. So the great challenge for us is not to let them. We must bar their way.

In essence, what we need to know is who is going to pay for the work of reconstruction? The capitalists' view is that the people must pay. The people have seen the blood of their sons flow freely on the battlefield, in front of firing squads, in prisons, in concentration camps and even under the guillotine's blade. The people have suffered. They have never shied away from sacrifice. The men and women who fought and died for France, who worked and will work willingly for the rebirth of their homeland, are ready to make sacrifices and put all their energies into helping the nation to rise again. But who could blame them for being unwilling to sacrifice themselves for a minority of selfish and insolent parasites, whose class hatred is apparent in their every word and deed. (*Loud applause*) No one could blame them for that. What we have to recognise, all of us, is that the forces of reaction are bent on revenge, and, when I talk of the forces of reaction, I do not just mean in France, but in the rest of the world, too.

Which of us, in the current circumstances, could fail to see the close link which exists between what is going on here and what is being planned elsewhere? When the worthy President of the United States talks about freedom of enterprise, there are people here who get the message and understand full well that these sibylline words are merely a cloak for opposition to nationalisation.

When, in the name of democracy, which always gets the blame, money was lent to Greece and Turkey, all our rabid anti-Communists quivered with joy. When we are presented with the Marshall Plan the people, with their customary good sense, naturally reply that they are happy to accept any aid on offer with a sense of deep gratitude, because the people have always had a great capacity for gratitude. But, amongst the masses, this gratitude comes with a determination not to let anyone mess with their national independence. (*Applause*) That is the clear and simple way in which the mass of the people sees it; but there are far more complicated individuals around who do not view the Marshall Plan in that way at all. There are those who have seen this Marshall Plan not so much as a means to reconstruction but more as a scheme for profit, to be milked for all that it is worth.

In the past few days, in the Palais Bourbon, I had to laugh at a number of confidences vouchsafed to me by people who seemed to have very keen noses — but, in the event, they were the keen noses of hunting dogs barking up the wrong tree (*Loud laughter ...*). These people, very distinguished, very important, confided knowingly to those close to them that the Soviet Union was not going to agree to the Anglo-French proposals, so it would be easy to mount a regular attack on her once again.

When asked a few questions about the substance of the proposals for US aid to rebuild Europe, they had to admit that the only document about the Marshall Plan was in fact the speech that Mr Marshall had given. Which is why I thought to myself, when it became known that the Soviet Government had said yes to the proposals: ‘some people have been shooting at the wrong target and will now feel a bit silly.’

In short, these things show that, for some people, rebuilding Europe is not the main concern. Those people are more interested in another, secondary agenda rather than the reconstruction of Europe.

The Soviet Union’s reply has come as a severe blow to all these groupings and, for our part, we hope that the debate on the Marshall Plan which starts today will produce a full picture of what needs to be done to rebuild the countries of Europe. But we Communists shall not lose sight of our main concerns, which are the question of Germany, the coalfields of the Ruhr, reparations and the security of our borders. There are those who would like to see these things forgotten, for political reasons on which we do not need to insist here. But we shall not forget. (*Applause*)

However, whilst it is true that there are those in France whose hatred of the people or class prejudice blinds them to the interest of their country, the national interest is, happily, expressed by the up-and-coming class, embodied by the workers and their party, the French Communist Party. (*Applause*)

And the French Communist Party is more than just the party of the working class: it is the party of the people, the party of France. (*Loud applause*)

The Communists have been kicked out to help move the Government to the right

My friends, it has to be said that we are living through difficult times. We all need to be alert to the fact.

We have been kicked out of the Government. They try to say that we withdrew of our own accord, but it is not true — we were kicked out. Why was that?

We were excluded from Government for supporting production subsidies and for saying that these subsidies could be given without any effect on prices.

For that contention we were portrayed as heretics. We were portrayed as men with no common sense. But we now see the Minister of Labour himself talking about giving production subsidies with no increase in prices. Yesterday’s heresy has become today’s official truth.

But, at the same time, recognition of this truth was accompanied by a dangerous shift to the right in French politics, and typical of that shift to the right is the way in which the workers are treated.

Let me remind you of a few facts which illustrate this:

The gas and electricity workers got what they wanted, but, instead of starting from there, the Government had begun with a decree of expropriation, and our Party takes pride and honour in having deployed on this occasion, in 1947, the arguments which Jaurès used in 1910 against Briand. (*Applause*)

Then the railwaymen got what they wanted. I shall not dwell on the circumstances of the strike. We saw a Transport Minister telling us, ‘the 1910 strike was defeated by mobilisation; the 1920 strike by expropriation,’ and he then implied, without saying as much overtly, ‘I shall defeat the 1947 strike by using road transport,’ but it seems he was over-optimistic there. (*Laughter*)

A few days later, the Government had to back down. In all honesty, rather than giving in to the railwaymen after the strike, they could and should have given them what they wanted *before* the strike. (*Applause*) In that way, they could have avoided the strike and a loss to the national economy of several thousand million francs.

And today we have received news of something else.

The Congress was delighted yesterday at the news of the miners' victory. The Minister for Industry, Robert Lacoste, had been negotiating with the miners. But, since then, a restricted Council of Ministers has met, deliberated and taken decisions and, last night, reneged on everything previously agreed. They tell us that this is a new form of government activity. They tell us that it is the mark of a Government which governs! They say one thing one day and do the exact opposite the day after. I shall not bore you by harping on about it. You all know what I mean. (*Loud laughter*)

The inconsistency is only too evident. It is clear to everyone. This Government which governs is doing a fine job, would you not say? (*Loud laughter*)

The claim used to be that it was the Communists whose presence in Government made any signs of coherent and sustained authority impossible. The country now has a chance to judge that. I think that more and more French men and women are beginning to appreciate that, since we have been out of government, things are going from bad to worse. More and more French men and women also want things to change. That is the essence of the problem now before us. (*Applause*)

We Communists need, first of all, to understand why the country is in this mess. Then we must show the people what we can and must do to resolve it. So we need to look at the events which have brought us to this situation.

If the Socialist Party had accepted our proposal to join forces, French politics would have taken an altogether different turn

At our Party's Xth Congress in Paris in June 1945, I was asked to present a report on unity.

Proposals were made to our Socialist comrades. Maurice Thorez outlined them in his report. If these proposals on closer unity of action had been accepted, as a first step towards organic unity and coordination of the two parties' strengths in the run-up to the Constituent Assembly elections, the course of French political life would have been changed completely, and, beyond any doubt, there would now be a Communist and Socialist majority in the National Assembly. (*Loud applause*)

By no stretch of the imagination do I believe that France's problems would have been magically resolved if the Communists and Socialists had won more than 51 % of the vote, but, if we had, many of those problems would look different from the way they look today. The failure of politics in France to move towards a strengthening of the left results — it has to be said, because the truth must always be told — from the attitude of the Socialist Party.

But the Socialists chose instead to give official republican and 'Socialist' credentials to the MRP

In November 1944, a Socialist Party Congress was held and, shortly after this, the Inaugural Congress of the MRP.

The Socialist Congress declared itself in favour of unity, it is true, but, in the view of some leading Socialists, this was more lip service than the expression of a real desire for unity. At this time, the newspaper *Le Populaire*, the main mouthpiece of the Socialist Party, published numerous articles in a bid to convince Socialist comrades of the need for an understanding with the Popular Republican Movement (MRP). They had forgotten that, before the war, the Socialist Party had attacked our own policy of friendly overtures. I

should say here that this policy still applies. There are men and women in this Communist Party of ours who believe in God. They have a rightful place amongst us, because they are happy to be defenders of the people's cause, the cause of the national interest. (*Loud applause*)

The point that I want to make is that the Socialists who attacked our overtures of friendship before the war have, since 1944, been praising the Socialist leanings of those smart people in the MRP. On 23 November 1944, we find *Le Populaire* writing:

'We believe that the Christians, who favour reforming the structure of our economy along Socialist lines and who are no longer simply "for" the Republic, in the phrase current fifty years or so ago, but who are sincere and fervent democrats, might act as a focus for attracting a section of French public opinion.'

In their dogged desire to get closer to the Christians and, at the same time, to distance themselves from the Communists, the Socialists even enlisted Mauriac on their side.

Le Populaire wrote:

'Mr Mauriac thinks that there has been fault on both sides, as they say, in the quarrel which has always divided Christians and Socialists and that both camps have been guilty of excessive fanaticism and sectarianism. He gives an honest opinion of both sides. It may well be that there have been a number of unfortunate episodes and excesses in the Socialists' anti-clerical propaganda. The Socialists are trying to forge new ties now, because they perceive a shift in the views of many Christians.'

There has been a problem with secularism in politics, it is true. It was difficult to play that down, especially as the newly formed MRP was, to some degree, confessionally-based, but there was no stopping the Socialists, who showed all the fervour of new converts in seeking to cooperate with the MRP. The current Minister of the Interior wrote as follows:

'Should we allow differing views on education to be the only factor hampering the very desirable combination of those who want to nationalise banks, insurance, energy sources, mining, transport, etc. and who are thus in agreement on the essential issues of the present time?'

This marked the beginnings of an understanding between Socialists and MRP, and this at a time when what was needed was a proper appraisal of the issues involved in organising firm unity amongst the working class. The Socialist Party, for its part, was more concerned with the organisation of the parties generally, whereas, for ourselves and the Socialists, our interest lay in organising the working class into a single party. (*Applause*)

In *Le Populaire* of 11 November, our Socialist friends wrote:

'We have always hoped to see the emergence, as soon as possible, of a few powerful parties drawing their strength and cohesion from a dominant trend in political thought or from a given social and economic reality. It seems that we are moving in that direction. The MRP Congress, held after our own, is proof that the imperatives of the democratic way of life are winning through.'

... We also welcome a number of formulae set out in the general policy report and manifesto presented to

this new Party's Congress.

Firstly, an affirmation of loyalty to the general principles of the Republic.

... Secondly, as an essential prerequisite for rebuilding the Republic, the need for structural reforms.'

So, in this way, the Socialist Party was starting to claim that the MRP was 'republican' and even 'Socialist'.

And yet, the situation was simple. The forces of reaction in France wanted a new organisational formula. Parties had been discredited. It was thus very much in the reactionaries' interest to slip their men in behind a few genuine resisters in an attempt to influence a large section of public opinion through ambiguity.

The Socialist Party's attitude towards the MRP will make it easier for them to do this.

Dividing the working class only helps the forces of reaction

Nevertheless, on 4 December 1944, a 'Committee of Entente' was set up between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. This met for the first time on 19 December. Municipal elections took place on 29 April and 13 May 1945. In many localities, Socialist and MRP lists were drawn up with the aim of defeating the Communist Party.

In *Le Populaire* of 4 May 1945, Daniel Mayer hinted, and herein lies the genius of the Socialist Party (*Laughter*), that he wanted to encourage the MRP and use it as grist to the Socialist mill. But the Socialist Party ended up being grist to the MRP mill. (*Applause*)

Daniel Mayer then went on:

'Will they follow the destiny which social survival offers them? Will they become the major party of the French right, which is missing from the political chessboard? Or will they, in return for a less brilliant but more glorious future, stay faithful to the programme of the National Resistance Council, which several of their leaders actively helped to draft? Will they succeed in bringing together the Catholic elements who are not frightened by radical economic change or alliances with the revolutionary parties?'

That is the question which they must consider.

Will the Socialist militants allow me to add that, indirectly, we must consider it, too? Should our role not be to serve as a pole of attraction to the left of the MRP, counterbalancing the powerful influence of their right wing?'

This objective could have been achieved, admittedly, but only if the working class, combined within a single party, had played an increased political and social role in shaping our country's destiny. The Socialist leadership had a different agenda. So, in the first round of municipal elections, the Socialist Party and the MRP joined forces and maintained their coalition in the second round with the aim of defeating the Communist Party.

To justify this policy, Daniel Mayer issued the MRP with republican, Socialist and secular credentials.

He wrote:

‘The Christian Socialist candidates on our lists, who are members of the MRP, are true resisters who have undertaken to respect the programme — included in the manifesto of the Socialist-Communist Committee of Entente — on nationalisation, the secularisation of state and education and measures to combat all remaining vestiges of the Vichy Government and of the Hitler era.’

It is true, as I said a few moments ago, that there were hidden motives behind this solicitude of the Socialist Party for the MRP. That much is plain from the texts quoted, but it is no less true that the policy of the Socialist leadership, which seemed at the time to be one of supporting the MRP only to cut it off later from its left wing, has been a dismal failure. If the MRP has become the country’s second party, it owes that fact primarily to the policy of the Socialist Party. That is the truth of it.

Despite all this, the results of the municipal elections were not brilliant, either for the Socialist Party or for the MRP. While all this was going on, Léon Blum came back. It may be said that, from that moment on, everything possible was done to break down relations between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. Whereas our Congress had raised the question of unity, Léon Blum wrote numerous articles against unity, and, at the Socialist Congress of August 1945, he sought to provide a theoretical justification for the division of the working class. Revising the doctrinal basis of Marxism, he tried to justify all his Party’s anti-Communist alliances. He spoke of this supposed ‘humanist Socialism’ as a reason for the Socialist Party to be part of the most immoral coalitions.

I shall not dwell on the theoretical aspects of this question but merely demonstrate the practical effects which followed on from it.

In the cantonal elections, the Socialist Party and MRP stood together in a large number of cantons, notably in Haute-Vienne, and in some cantons in Nord, to name just the most striking cases.

You will also remember that, in the referendum of 21 October 1945, the Socialist Party and MRP stood together with de Gaulle in pursuit of the same objective of limiting the powers of the Constituent Assembly. Despite all this manoeuvring, the Communist Party came top of the list. The Socialist Party came a poor third. Despite everything, in the first Constituent Assembly elected in October 1945, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party held the majority.

In January 1946 — when the man from Colombey-les-deux-Eglises saw fit to resign, for reasons you know full well — the two parties could have formed a Socialist and Communist Government. We proposed it, but the Socialist Party refused. In this way, it helped the MRP, which had won the most votes of all the parties in the June elections, whilst the Socialist Party had lost votes. The Communist Party, for its part, was continuing to win votes.

The poor performance of the Socialist Party was the main feature of this election. It was the price that they paid for their policy of hostility towards the unity of the working class. This decline in the Socialist Party’s fortunes meant that, in the second Constituent Assembly, the Socialist Party and Communist Party no longer held a majority of seats by themselves. Even so, the Socialists could have held onto the presidency of the Government, as our Party was proposing, but the Socialist Party stuck with the MRP right to the end and refused, leaving the presidency of the Government to the MRP, which had opposed the proposed Constitution.

Anti-Communist feeling has led the Socialist Party into reactionary policies

On 3 September 1946, the Socialist Congress disbanded the Committee of Entente between the Communist Party and Socialist Party. That Committee had already been put on the back burner by the Socialist Party’s Steering Committee.

The elections of 10 November brought further losses for the Socialist Party, and this is the root cause of the

acute difficulties that we are witnessing at present.

The attitude of the Socialist Party has strengthened the positions of the MRP, when we could have strengthened both the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. That would have been better for us all and for this country's working class. (*Loud applause*)

It is anti-Communism which is responsible for our difficulties, anti-Communism which has dictated this policy, anti-Communism which has led the Socialist Party to favour the Communist Party's removal from Government. History will quite properly record the decree excluding the Communist Ministers from Government as the betrayal of a policy which our two parties shaped together. This decree bears the signature of Socialist Ministers. Since then, there has been praise for the Prime Minister, Mr Ramadier, from everyone, except us. In the National Assembly, we hear a mixture of wild applause from the PRL, satisfied applause from the MRP, discreet applause from the *Rassemblement des Gauches* and somewhat shamefaced applause from the Socialist Party. (*Laughter*)

But Mr Ramadier cannot be unaware that the applause is not so much for him but rather against us and against the working class. However, despite this general *entente*, there has been no stopping the workers from pushing through their legitimate demands, which their anxiety over the current political situation has made a matter of even greater urgency for them.

It was hoped, in some circles, that the labour movement could be crushed, but those hopes have been dashed. Yet the anti-worker policy continues, against the interests of the people and against the true interests of the country. We recently saw that with the financial plans put forward by the Government and approved by the National Assembly. These plans are unpopular, and they are also ineffectual. We are told they will save the currency, but, in truth, you would have to be blind or stupid not to see that they will push up prices and set a trend likely to favour inflation. These plans are also deeply unfair, since they hurt the toiling masses.

The Socialists approved this plan; so did the MRP; so did part of the *Rassemblement des Gauches*, but differences of opinion were discernible within the *Rassemblement des Gauches* and in some areas of the MRP membership. When the financial plan was finally put to the vote, a feeling of malaise descended over the Assembly. And the vote had only just been carried when Albert Gazier made his challenge by *interpellation*. This speech of Gazier's was deliberately aggressive, against the *Rassemblement des Gauches* and, to a degree, against the MRP too.

One phrase stands out in this speech. Gazier said: **'Since January 1946, three out of the four Prime Ministers have been Socialists. We are prepared to shoulder our full responsibilities, but not to pursue other people's policies.'** Those are not my words, are they? (*Laughter*) I would be careful not to say something like that.

What, in fact, is the significance of this outburst by Gazier, deemed somewhat untimely by some of our colleagues in the National Assembly? It is proof of a deep unease at the heart of the Socialist Party. That unease was already apparent in the debate on the financial plans; in the behaviour of the Socialist Members of the Assembly, you saw a reflection of the fear felt by the constituency leaders, the fear felt by the Party grass roots. You only needed to watch them manoeuvring, operating, to see their Party's fears weighing upon them, especially just ahead of the Socialist National Council meeting.

When we Communists proposed that military appropriations for the year 1947 should not exceed a total of 150 000 million, men of the right jumped up and said 'No, you must be joking, that is not possible.'

But the Socialists said, 'But we cannot have the Communists taking all the credit here.' This probably explains why Max Lejeune then came up with an amendment. He was not willing to vote with us for the ceiling of 150 000 million on military spending, but he went as far as 180 000 million. And we saw the strange spectacle of Socialist Members who did not vote for our ceiling of 150 000 million, while we, after being defeated, did vote for their ceiling of 180 000 million. And, when the Minister of Finance asked the

Assembly to support the Government, the Socialist Members ignored his call. If that had happened when we were part of the government, those keen to give lessons in ministerial solidarity would have stood up and reproached us most bitterly. It seems that, when anyone other than ourselves is involved, an absence of ministerial solidarity becomes the norm.

In all these recent debates, Socialist Members went along with our proposals as if they were haunted, not by remorse, perhaps, but by fear. Each time that we put forward a proposal, they tried to see what they could do to save face. But, whenever they voted against the Government, when they failed to respond to ministerial blandishments no one thought anything of it. Everyone understood that it was 'just a bit of fun'.

But the Gazier speech nevertheless poses an important problem, since the Government is considering a vote of confidence. The motion will be put down in a few days' time, but it has been decided to postpone the Socialist National Council meeting until after the vote of confidence, and we now await the outcome of this challenge. What does it mean, and what lies behind it?

I shall try to show you in brief and simple terms how we might interpret it. Firstly, it reflects the profound disagreement existing amongst the parties which form the majority in Government. Gazier managed to get the Air Force Minister and a number of MRP colleagues on his side. And, as one MRP member commented, Gazier's speech suggested not so much a desire to bring about union as a desire to provoke excommunication. Nor are all the Socialists in agreement. And Ramadier, having driven the Communists out of government, seems to be adopting a famous formula here. It is the one used by Napoleon's mother, Laetitia Bonaparte, who, somewhat sceptical about the fortunes of the Empire, observed 'Provided it lasts.' (*Loud laughter*)

I think that that is Ramadier's position, too. He, too, wants it to last. (*Applause*) But I have to say that this position may be very understandable in a sitting President of the Council, but it is far less so in would-be presidents of the Council, and we have a few of those, do we not? (*Laughter*) So do not be surprised if Ramadier's profound thinking is not shared by everyone; and we may say without fear of being wrong that the position of the President of the Council by no means enjoys the support of a majority of the Socialist Party, within which opinions are very divided. There are unquestionably those in the Socialist Party who would like to see a return to a totally Socialist government, and, when I heard Gazier addressing the National Assembly, I thought to myself that he is one of those. There are even Socialists who would like to see the Socialists pulling out of government and leaving the MRP a free hand. They have already exaggerated the importance of this MRP, so they might as well exaggerate it a bit more now.

But what merit do these solutions actually have? None of them are worth anything, not one of them. The *status quo*, that is to say the position of Ramadier and others, what does it mean? It would inevitably accentuate the shift to the right, with all the risks that that entails. Consequently, maintenance of the *status quo* is unacceptable to the Socialist militants who think like Socialists. As for a totally Socialist government, that idea merely suggests capitulation in the face of the parties under which day-to-day government is precarious, if I may put it that way.

So this second solution is worth no more than the first. And, as for the other, that ducking of responsibilities would mean opening the door to a form of French *Gasperi tactics* with the likelihood of a shift towards personal power. Consequently, none of these solutions can satisfy a probing Socialist conscience — the solution of those who want the Ramadier Government to continue, of those who want a return to a totally Socialist government, or of those who want to see the Socialist Ministers out of the Government. None of these is acceptable.

Because all these scenarios are contrary to the interests of France, the interests of the people, the interests of Socialism.

I tell you, our Socialist comrades would bear a heavy burden of responsibility if, at their forthcoming National Council, they were to open the way for one of these solutions, which are all as bad as each other.

Acting together we, the Communists, would be no less strong, and the Socialists would be stronger

At this point, I want to speak to our Socialist comrades not only in the language of reason but also in the language of the heart. I say to them: **‘Comrades, since the Liberation you have been the victims of a policy presented to you as necessary to protect your party. They have appealed to your party-based patriotism, they have told you to be wary of the Communists. When we made overtures to you, you ignored them, and whilst you were focusing on us, your party was under attack from the other side and receiving blows from which you are still reeling.**

But if we had marched hand in hand, my Socialist comrades, we Communists would be no less strong and you, you would be stronger. Working together, we would now be a decisive force in shaping and pursuing our country’s policies. So what are you going to do now, my Socialist comrades? Your burden of responsibility is heavy; we must impress that upon you and repeat it as you prepare for your Socialist National Council. If you leave things as they are, you will be condemning your Party to suicide, to the advantage of its partners in Government, you will cutting yourselves off for ever from the mass of the people, and they will blame your Party for what others do and force you to do. And you will not take that path, my Socialist comrades, any more than you will take the path which would make your Party a prisoner, a hostage of certain other parties.

Those who would hold you hostage might allow your Party a semblance of power for a time, enough time for you to fall a little further into disrepute, but they would take good care to hold on to the real power themselves. (*Loud applause*) Nor, my friends, will you take the path of renunciation, leaving the field free for others.

What, then, should you do? If you want to, my Socialist comrades, you can play an important role in demanding the formation of a democratic government in which our two parties can work together with other republicans, on the basis of a practical programme to implement the plan for rebuilding and redeveloping France.’

The government of France is a matter for the French

The people of France are demanding that our country return to democratic government based on universal suffrage. This and nothing else is the key to the wellbeing of our Homeland. (*Applause*) And the government of France is a matter for every French man and woman; no foreigner of any kind has the right to meddle in our domestic politics. (*Sustained applause*)

But we know that pressures are at work both inside and outside the country to push France to the right. However, for these to succeed, the Communists must be out of government, and for France’s national independence to be surrendered, the Communists must be out of government. This is why this great party of ours is hated by the enemies of France and of the people.

It is our duty to scupper the plans of all our adversaries. Everything depends on us, and we have to appreciate that the situation requires each of us to be fully aware of our responsibilities.

All too often, comrades are tricked into believing all manner of fatalist ideas which relieve them of the need to act. There is nothing more anti-Marxist than the concept of fatalism. History is not preordained; we write it each day through our struggle, and we ourselves hold the key to our ultimate success or failure. (*Applause*)

There are those who say sometimes, of our adversaries: ‘They are all united against us. There is nothing we can do against any of them.’ That is a simplistic view of things. Life is infinitely more complicated than that. And in our society of conflicting class interests, the tendency for everyone to band together against the Communists does not mean an end to antagonisms and disagreements amongst our adversaries. We must show a timely awareness of the importance and scale of these antagonisms and disagreements, and we must be able to identify opportunities as they arise, in the interests of democracy and of the working class.

Without our Party, France would be half colonised

A big party like ours can radically change the politics of France. And it is blindingly obvious that, if the Communist Party were not there, France would already be a lot further to the right; she would already be half colonised. (*Sustained applause*)

But the working class is there, and the Communist Party is there, and those in the opposing camp are feeling our energy and efficiency. (*Applause*)

But we need to understand that the stronger we are, the more the enemy will mobilise all his resources against us. Our party thus needs to redouble its efforts. Everything must be done to create conditions conducive to the formation of a democratic government, and this is a matter not just for Parliament but also for the masses who have a say in the life of our country.

That requires the Party to be in touch with the masses. It requires a policy of fraternal contacts with our Socialist comrades, and it also requires us to woo the masses, as several speakers have urged and as comrade Maurice Thorez advocates in his report.

All that is essential by way of proper preparation for the municipal elections, which are difficult elections and need proper preparation. We really must get ready for the fight and not wait for victory to fall into our laps; we must secure it by our own efforts.

And in our thousands and tens of thousands we can and must work to recruit new members to our Party. There is a place in our Party for all these older people who, by joining us, in the eventide of life, can devote their remaining vigour to the cause of the people, to that most noble of causes, the cause of Communism. (*Applause*)

And we can win tens of thousands of young people for the great cause of Communism. There is no nobler ideal than Communism to light up the lives of our twenty-year-olds, to whom our Party flings wide its doors. Our Party has always been a party of the young: Maurice Thorez was Secretary of our Communist Party at the age of 25. (*Loud applause*)

We can very quickly become a large party of the masses and attract a huge number of men and women, and if we succeed in making them realise the importance of belonging to our Party, we shall have won a major political battle. Every man and woman joining the ranks of our Party must understand that his or her membership is a contribution to this great battle, which seeks to halt the shift to the right and lead France back to the left.

Let us strengthen the Party and mobilise the masses under the banner of unity

Joining the Party at the moment means joining to win over France to the cause of democracy, and this is the message that we have to get across to hundreds of thousands of men and women.

So it is by working in depth, working amongst the masses, that our Party can today play a decisive role in determining the political direction of France. I am certain that our Socialist comrades will not be deaf to the appeal that we are making to them. It is possible, admittedly, that some of their leaders may be prepared to destroy their own party to serve interests in no way connected with those of the working class, but we say to our Socialist comrades: 'If you have any love left for your Party, and you do, your duty is to stand with us to defend the cause of the working class and freedom and, at the same time, to defend your Party.'

Our Congress can claim a number of victories, but it is not an occasion for resting on our laurels. This Congress marks not a period of rest but a moment when we must start mobilising all our energies. We need to fight harder than ever. We have to go a long way back in our country's history to find events which have demanded so much of us. The future has never been so full of danger, or so promising.

Everything depends on us, everything depends on our efforts, and the essential thing is that all Communists should leave this Congress with a deep determination to fight as they have never fought before to secure victory.

Armed with the doctrine of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, we shall overcome every obstacle. Faced with the efforts of the forces of reaction, which want to make France into a base for operations against democracy, we must do our utmost to unite the working class and the forces of democracy.

France will not retreat — No! France will not betray her glorious traditions — No! The reactionaries will not be able to hold up France as an example to the world. And they will not be able to do so thanks to us and to our efforts.

As heirs to our great ancestors of the Revolution, to the rebels of 1830 and those who manned the barricades in 1848, and as those who carry on the torch of the immortal heroes of the Paris Commune, we Communists have a duty to be at the forefront of our people's struggle to secure France's independence and enable democracy to triumph.

For the struggle and for victory, Communist comrades, let us get to work!

The Congress erupts into wild enthusiasm. Jacques Duclos receives applause which carries on until the strains of the Marseillaise are heard.