

## 'American aid' from Le Populaire (6 November 1947)

**Caption:** On 6 November 1947, in the French daily newspaper Le Populaire, Léon Blum, former President of the French Council of State, defends himself against accusations made by Maurice Thorez, Secretary-General of the French Communist Party, who criticises him for having served American imperialism by accepting financial aid from Uncle Sam.

**Source:** Le Populaire. 06.11.1947. Paris: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). "L'aide américaine", auteur:Blum, Léon.

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## American aid

by Léon Blum

Thirty years ago, when I was making my parliamentary debut, reactionaries from the National Bloc would charmingly label me a German-paid lawyer. 'Go and eat your sauerkraut in Berlin!' they would shout, as I took the platform. Now I earn my pittance in Washington. Maurice Thorez and Georges Cogniot are denouncing me as a secret agent of American imperialism. Having worked for the 'Krauts', I am now employed by the 'Yankees'! Not that I am complaining. It is progress, after all.

Let us nevertheless look a bit more closely at my crime. I set off early last year, as a representative of a government which included the Communists, of which Maurice Thorez was a member, of which he was a influential and respected Deputy Prime Minister, no less. The broad outlines of the Monnet Plan had recently been established. This had taken place with total support from the Communist Members of the Government — Maurice Thorez, Vice-President of the Council, and François Billoux, Minister of Economic Affairs. The preliminary documents had been drawn up with the full collaboration of the Communist leaders of the CGT.

It was concluded that to import the raw materials and equipment necessary to restart and 'modernise' the French economy would, up until 1950, require a budget deficit which was agreed by François Billoux to be in the region of 4 000 million dollars. This deficit would have been impossible to cover without a foreign loan. In this instance, a foreign loan essentially, and almost necessarily, meant an American loan. It was this loan which Felix Gouin's government, with Communist involvement, gave me the responsibility of negotiating in Washington. At this juncture, the situation was perfectly clear. However, I did not want to accept my mission once and for all before its significance and ultimate aims had been clearly defined in a ministerial meeting with both sides being heard, during a sort of exclusive Cabinet council chaired by Felix Gouin, and with the participation of Maurice Thorez and François Billoux.

The French Government was adamant that it would not subordinate the granting of these American loans to any conditions of a political, diplomatic or military nature. I received explicit instructions on this point, and I must immediately add that I was never obliged to refer to them, since in two and a half months of negotiations nobody suggested, or even insinuated to me, anything which resembled conditions of this nature. However, it was not difficult to predict that two preliminary questions would be asked of me, and it was for this reason that I wished to be in a position to answer ON BEHALF OF A UNANIMOUS GOVERNMENT. The first was: 'It may be that the usual change in majorities in France will lead to a Communist-led government. Will that government acknowledge and fulfil the obligations entered into vis-à-vis the American Administration?' The second was: 'Does France intend to bring its economic policies into line with the general principles of free international trade, as they were summarily defined in the lease-lend contracts, and which the United States intend to support more explicitly before the International Conference on Trade and Employment?' As regards these two points, I sought — even demanded — an explicit answer from the ministerial meeting, and more particularly from the Communist Ministers present. As regards these two points, the answer was in the affirmative, categorical and unanimous. Maurice Thorez did not even allow the first question to be discussed, so much did it seem to him to 'go without saying'. The second, on the other hand, was the subject of a long and serious debate, and a decision was taken only in full knowledge of the facts. When, several weeks later, I signed a general draft agreement on economic policy with Mr Byrnes, I became the faithful representative and agent of the Government of the French Republic IN ITS UNANIMITY.

Today, Maurice Thorez and François Billoux have changed their minds, or at least their conduct. Their position and statements of March 1946 may be counted among the mistakes which they confessed to the court of penitence. But to have negotiated an American loan, to have secured it WITHOUT THE SHADOW OF A POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC OR MILITARY CONDITION, to have upheld France's commitment to an international economic policy which, in reality, is in keeping with all the democratic traditions and Socialist policies; *that*, today, is called treason, subjection to American imperialism, giving one's consent to servitude, etc., etc. So be it, but let them not forget that our treason today follows on from their treason

yesterday and that, because the changes do not depend on them, it anticipates their treason tomorrow. And let them also remember that contrition will always be tainted with indulgence.