

November 19, 1944

**Record of the Conversation of Comrade I.V. Stalin
with the General Secretary of the CC French
Communist Party, Comrade Thorez**

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Summary:

French communist Comrade Thorez and Stalin discuss the situation of the Communist Party in France.

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Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Record of the Conversation of Comrade I.V. Stalin with
the General Secretary of the CC French Communist Party, Comrade Thorez

19 November 1944, 8:00 pm

Present at the conversation were Comrades Molotov and Beria.

After an exchange of mutual greetings com. Stalin asks when com. Thorez intends to travel to France.

Com. Thorez responds that he expects to fly from Moscow tomorrow with his wife and a member of the French Communist Party CC Ramet.

Com. Stalin asks on which plane Com. Thorez will fly.

Com. Thorez responds that to Teheran he takes a Soviet plane, and then a British one, and, if possible, then a French one.

Com. Stalin says that perhaps one should arrange the trip of Thorez on a Soviet plane to Paris. The British might be up to something (zateiat chego nebut)...

Com. Molotov says that it is possible to arrange the flight of Com. Thorez on our plane to Paris.

Com. Stalin asks what questions Com. Thorez wants to ask.

Com. Thorez responds that the most important issue for the French communists is a question about how to pass through the current difficult period when the communists are not the masters of France, when they have there both friends and enemies. What they must do to collect their forces and to thwart the reaction's effort to collect its forces.

Com. Stalin asks what kind of person is Bidault (chto iz sebia predstavliaet).

Com. Thorez says that before the war Bidault allied with the party of popular democrats. He is a catholic. Before the war he issued newspaper L 'Aube, an opposition Catholic newspaper.

Com. Stalin asks to whom that newspaper stood in opposition.

Com. Thorez says that that newspaper was in opposition to the official leaders of the Catholic Church. On the issues of foreign policy, Bidault, before the war, took a position close to the position of French Communists. He stood for good relations with the USSR, fought against Munich, against Germany. However, after the breakout of the war he, as well as many people who had heretofore been close to the communists, turned against them more fiercely than other enemies of communists. After the breakout of the war he was recruited, served in the army, was taken prisoner by the Germans, and then was liberated from imprisonment.

Com. Stalin asks if Bidault was set free by the Germans or he fled from captivity.

Com. Thorez responds that Bidault was liberated by the Germans because he was a participant of the First World War, and the Germans set such people free. However, this rule the Germans applied not to all participants of the First World War.

Com. Stalin express surprise on the account that a former prisoner of war holds a post in the government.

Com. Thorez says that there are also other people in the government who were in German captivity. One is General Jouen. He was in German prison and was then liberated and appointed by the Vichy government to Africa as a commander of French troops to replace Weigand whom the Germans did not completely trust. Minister of Finance Le Perq, recently deceased, happened to be in German prison as well.

Com. Stalin asks what is the relationship between the French Communists and the Socialists was.

Com. Thorez responds that the Communists managed to succeed in winning over the masses of socialist workers. However, the leadership of the Socialist Party does not want to cooperate with the Communists. Recently at the Congress of the French Socialist Party its secretary in his speech said that Socialists stood for unity with Communists, but in reality Socialists renounce unity. Socialists declare that everything is fine in France, all people are good, except for the Communists who have to be rehabilitated for the position they took at the outbreak of the war with the

Germans. The leadership of the Socialist Party points out that at the beginning of the war, the Communists had not been advocates of defense of motherland, and only after 1941 they became heroes in the struggle with the Germans.

Com. Stalin says that there could be pressure applied on the Socialists in order to achieve the isolation of Communists. It is quite possible that de Gaulle might take steps to isolate the Communist Party.

Com Stalin says that he thinks that for this contingency it would be better if the Party had an ally. The party must look around (prismotretsia) and look for allies among the radicals who are still perhaps do not constitute formal groups of radicals. One must look for allies among the socialists, as well. One should attempt to create a bloc against reaction. It would be good to attract also the socialists into this bloc. Perhaps there will also some other elements who could be utilized in such a bloc. One should build certain forces grouping around the Communist Party, for defense, and when the situation changes, for an offensive as well. The communists must not search among the socialists for who, when and what was said against the Soviet Union. We know the socialists well. The socialists are the left wing of bourgeoisie. For us the main goal now is to create the leftist bloc. The Communist Party, however strong it could be, must not be the only force struggling against reaction. The Communist Party should not be isolated. The urgent task for the party is building close ties with trade unions, with the youth. The youth must not be called communist youth. It should be taken into account that some people get scared by [red] flags. It should be accounted for.

The communists, Com. Stalin continues, are not so strong to take only upon themselves the burden of struggle against reaction. Com. Stalin says that he wishes the party did not exaggerate its forces. If enemies manage to provoke the party, it would be strangled. Leftist bloc must be built gradually and patiently. If there were successes in this business, then reaction would be less brazen (budet bolee ostorozhnoi).

Com. Stalin says that Communists should keep in mind that de Gaulle will be pushed to take measures against Communists even if he would not wish to undertake them by himself; he will be pushed to this by the British and the Americans who would like to create a reactionary government in France, as everywhere, wherever they can pull it off. Therefore, the party at first must have allies, even weak ones. If the leader of the Socialist Party said in his report that the party of socialists stood for unity with the Communist Party, then you should respond "Please!" You must attract also other political groups into a bloc under construction. You should have allies in trade unions, create something like a bloc.

Com. Stalin asks if the Resistance organization has any kind of armed forces.

Com. Thorez responds that there are armed units of patriotic militia which were the main force of resistance during the occupation of France. At the moment those militia units keep their weapons.

Com. Stalin says that one should reckon with the fact that at the moment there is a government in France recognized by the Allied Powers. Under these circumstances it is hard for the communists to maintain parallel armed forces, since there is a regular army. The communists could be asked why do they need parallel armed units. As long as there was no provisional government, there was no rear zone, where [this government] rules, the existence of those units made certain sense. Why do these units exist now, when there is government which has its army? Such could be the arguments of the enemies of Communists. These arguments can sway a main-street French. Therefore the argument of the Communist Party for maintaining its armed forces is weak and will be weak. It is hard to defend this position. Therefore you must transform the armed units into another organization, into a political organization, and you must hide [your] weapons.

Com. Stalin explains that he touched on this issue only because it seems to him that Communists still do not understand that the situation in France has changed. The communists are flaunting [the enemy] and holding the old line, and meanwhile the situation is already different. They would like to send to the devil all those scoundrels, the Socialists, while they should seek to build a bloc and seek allies among the Socialists. Communists are trying to preserve militia. It will not be this way. The government has been created that is recognized by Great Britain, Soviet Union,

United States, and other powers, but Communists continue to act from inertia. Meanwhile the situation is new, different, and it provides de Gaulle with opportunities. The situation has changed and you must take a turn (sdelat povorot). The Communist Party is not so strong as to be able to club the government on its head. It must accumulate forces and seek allies. You must take measures so that in case of reactionary offensive the communists could have a solid defense and could say that the reaction would be attacking not communists but people. If the situation were not to change for the better, then the forces rallied against the Party would be useful in its future offensive.

You need a platform for political organization. This platform must include resurrection of industries, granting jobs for unemployed, defense of democracy, punishment of those who had smothered democracy.

Com. Stalin asks what the organization of resistance in France is called.

Com. Thorez responds that this organization is called "The Resistance Movement."

Com. Stalin says that it should be given another name. Perhaps it should be named "Resurrection Front (front vosstanovleniia). Before one could speak about liberation of the country, now [one says] about resurrection, rehabilitation. It would be good if you consolidate under this banner the forces of the Left, workers, intellectuals, circles of culture.

Com. Thorez says that it would be good to attract also peasants to this movement.

Com. Stalin says that he forgot to mention the peasants. They must certainly be attracted to this movement. There are people among them who might be of use.

The Communist Party must be strong and must be surrounded by allies. Enemies want to isolate the Communist Party. You must not let it happen.

Then Com. Stalin says that this bloc should hardly be named "front." In this case it would remind bourgeoisie of "Popular Front." One should look for another name.

Perhaps it can be called: "Movement for strengthening of democracy in France." If one says "Movement of struggle for democracy," some can respond that there is democracy in France, there is a republic, etc. Perhaps the best way to name would be "Movement for resurrection of a strong France and strengthening of democracy." This is of course too long for a name, but French Communists can find a better title themselves. Com. Stalin explains that he only hints at an idea, but French Communists can find specific forms for its implementation.

The platform of this movement, says Com. Stalin, must include, first of all, economic rehabilitation of the country and reinforcement of democracy. The platform should be formulated within this framework.

Com. Stalin says that he gave all remarks he wanted to give, and asks if Com. Thorez has questions with regard to these remarks.

Com. Thorez responds that he has no questions.

Then Com. Stalin says that de Gaulle wants to take part in occupation of Germany. In one of his speeches de Gaulle says that the French wants to test their strength before the end of the war. In a word, de Gaulle wants to demonstrate what the Gauls are. He is not afraid of taking a militant stand towards Germany. Incidentally, de Gaulle complained to our people that he would like to obtain weapons for [the French] party, but the British and the Americans do not give him weapons.

Com. Stalin asks how many divisions de Gaulle has at his disposal.

Com. Thorez responds that de Gaulle has five French divisions, armed by American weapons. Besides, there are French guerrilla units which do not have heavy armament. They are armed only with rifles (ruzhiami). By the way, these guerrilla forces block the ports of the French Western coast held by the Germans.

Com. Stalin says that Churchill, when he was in Moscow, touched on the issue about the future of the Rhein region and the Saar. Churchill came out for dismemberment of Germany. He said that Germany, not counting Eastern Prussia that would be annexed to Poland, should be divided into the following three parts: first, Prussia, second, Austria with a center in Vienna, including Southern German provinces-Baaden and Wuerttemberg; third, Westfalen and the Rein region which should constitute a separate area under international control. The idea to create such an area will not

allow Germany to use iron and coal. Massigli allegedly favors this plan. He once spoke in favor of a separation of the Rhein region and Westfalen [from Germany] and for establishment of international control there.

Com. Stalin says that he does not recommend that Communists hold out a demand to annex the Rein region and the Saar. Situation is unclear. One should find out what would be the attitude of French people to these demands. Meanwhile it would be better to stay away from the slogan of annexation. If the situation changes and it would be clear that public opinion, intelligentsia, people are in favor of [annexation], then it is a different thing. Com. Stalin says that he fears lest the Communists find themselves in one camp with the darkest reactionaries. And then the Communists will be told: "See, who are you with!" This slogan can wait. Wait for a month, perhaps for two months. One should gather data, sound out the ground.

Com. Stalin remarks that de Gaulle in his speech spoke for annexation of German territory, while Bidault spoke against this annexation. What is on? Is it imaginable that a single government can pursue two different political lines [?]

Com. Stalin asks how Bidault treats the issue of Alsace and Lorraine.

Com. Thorez answers that Bidault regards Alsace and Lorraine as part of French territory. Speaking about renunciation of annexations by France, Bidault means that Alsace and Lorraine belong to France.

Com. Thorez says that, in his opinion, Bidault spoke against annexations of German territory with an aim in mind to speak also against the transfer of a part of the current German territory to Poland. French reactionaries want that Poland protrude as deep as possible into the Soviet Union, and therefore it is not in their interest to shift Poland to the West. French reactionaries, as well as the British, would like to see Poland as a tool against the Soviet Union.

Com. Stalin says that the British and the French certainly want it, but it will not to be. Poles want to obtain rich, developed German regions, and they will lose only the Pinsk marshes.

Com. Stalin asks if military plants now operate in France.

Com. Thorez answers that the plants are mostly inactive. It is usually explained by the lack of raw materials, disorganization of transportation, and similar kinds of reasons. In those places where workers began to operate the plants on their own initiative, the central authorities intervened and disrupted the plants' operation. Thus there is stagnation in the French industry and there are many unemployed.

Com. Stalin says that one of the major tasks of the mass movement for restoration of France must be setting in operation of industrial enterprises, first of all of military industry.

Com. Stalin says that in the Soviet Union industry suffered from the war more than the French industry, yet we are managing to restore rather quickly the industry in the regions that were under German occupation. We are also restoring bridges, railroads and some other things.

Com. Thorez says that workers in locals would like to restore industry, but as far as the central authorities are concerned, the matter gets stalled. This is sabotage, says Com. Thorez.

Com. Stalin agrees that this is sabotage and says that it is necessary to fight for restoration of French industry.

Com. Thorez remarks that the British and Americans do not want restoration of industry in France.

Com. Stalin agrees and says that the British and Americans wish that industry existed only in their countries and the whole world buy their goods. That is why their air forces bomb industrial installations in Germany with such appetite. The British and Americans want to destroy more industrial plants in Germany so that it will be harder to get reparations from Germany. Com. Stalin asks what to do if de Gaulle requests weapons from the Soviet Union.

Should we give him weapons?

Com. Thorez answers that all depends on how this weapon will be used.

Com. Stalin says that it is hard to make the delivery of weapons conditional in this

way. Com. Stalin asks if the British are giving weapons to the French.

Com. Thorez answers that Churchill in one of his announcements promised to give weapons to the French, but in a second declaration he said that in view of the fact that the French had so far received only American weapons, this issue should be reconsidered and one should strive to achieve unification of the types of weapons transferred [to the French].

Com. Stalin asks if the French troops occupy a certain sector of the front against the German troops.

Com. Thorez answers that they have a segment at the southern extremity of the front against Belfort.

Com. Stalin asks if de Gaulle's five French divisions consist of the French or of the colonial troops.

Com. Thorez answers that there is a large portion of colonial troops in these divisions.

Com. Stalin says that old French commanders will seek to preserve colonial forces, since they are very docile. One should strive to have as many French as possible in the French army. Com. Stalin says that one should also seek that the French forces have their own sector of the front and that the troops at that sector would be under French command.

Com. Thorez says that in his opinion France should have a strong army.

Com. Stalin responds that he agrees with this and the French Communists should not be afraid of creating a large army. They should have their people in the army.

Com. Stalin says that there is a French air squadron "Normandy" fighting on the Soviet-German front. Our people praise the pilots of this air squadron. They say that the French pilots fight well. There are real aces among them. Does Thorez know these pilots?

Com. Thorez answers that he knows, but not everybody. He says that among those pilots there are reactionary personalities, representatives of old noble families. They always stood aside and they were treated with a tinge of suspicion. However, when recently the flight crews of the air squadron received awards, then these pilots received decorations. This impressed the entire squadron. Thorez heard about it the other day from General Petey.

Com. Stalin says that we do not give awards for nothing and those who fight the Germans well get decorations. We are thinking of awarding some of the French pilots the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Com. Stalin asks that perhaps de Gaulle during his visit in the Soviet Union might ask our permission to transfer the squadron "Normandy" to France. Should the pilots be permitted to take their armaments, i.e. planes, with them?

Com. Thorez says that it would be fine and adds that the French pilots are very proud that they fight in such good fighters.

Com. Stalin responds that the planes are rather good indeed and adds that it would be awkward to disarm the pilots before their departure from the Soviet Union. So one has to let them go with their planes. Com. Stalin asks if Thorez has questions for him and the present comrades.

Com. Thorez answers that he has no more questions.

Finishing the conversation, Com. Stalin wishes Thorez success and asks him to send regards to the French comrades, Duclos, Marti and others. Shaking hands with Com. Stalin in a farewell, Thorez says that he assures him in his allegiance to our cause and to Com. Stalin and thanks for the reception.

Com. Stalin answers that it is not appropriate to thank among comrades.

Com. Thorez says that he still thanks Com. Stalin and always needs his advice.

The conversation lasted for 1 hour 45 minutes.

Recorded by Podtserob