

November 18, 1947

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

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Summary:

Stalin and Thorez discuss the status of the French Communist Party in the post-war world, as well as the ongoing struggle between communists and other left-wing groups in France.

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Russian

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the Secretary of the CC French Communist Party Thorez

Moscow, 18 November 1947.

Present: Molotov, Suslov.

[Thorez began the conversation with expression of respect and gratitude to com. Stalin on behalf of all members of French communist party and the CC FCP]

Com. Stalin asks jocularly if Thorez is thanking him for the fact that in Warsaw [at the meeting of the Cominform in September 1947] the French communists were berated. [rugali].

Thorez responds that the Communist Party of France is all too grateful for having been told about its shortcomings ...

Thorez said that the estimate of the situation presented at the conference of nine communist parties is being brilliantly corroborated in France. In particular, the interference of the Americans in the country is increasing, economic difficulties are aggravating, class struggle is growing more acute. The French Communist Party, according to the instructions of the conference of the nine, is waging struggle in defense of the country's independence and is fighting alone against the entire coalition of reactionary forces. At the last municipal elections the French communist party managed to preserve and even partially increase the number of its voters. At the present moment de Gaulle has managed to rally around himself all most extreme reactionary forces of France. It was achieved to the detriment of the socialists and particularly the MRP [Mouvement Republicaine Populaire], who have lost a large number of votes at the elections ...

[Thorez asks Stalin's opinion about French political groupings that regard themselves as a third force between the communists and the supporters of de Gaulle]

Stalin says that in France there will be probably further consolidation and polarization of forces. Of course, the communists will gain in strength, but the DeGaullists will also gain in strength. All who would like to position themselves between war and peace will lose their prestige. Today there is a question of choice between peace and war. One should make a choice between supporters of peace and advocates of war. There can be no vacillation.

[Thorez and Stalin discussed the situation inside the French socialist party. Stalin supported and even reinforced Thorez's negative assessment of the socialists]

Com. Stalin says that it seems to him that the socialists in France, as well as the Labourists in England are creating for themselves a left wing in their parties. Most prominent leaders of the left wing are the agents of the Right. Such leaders as [Leon] Blum and others in France, as [Ernest] Bevin and others in England understand that serious opposition from below will grow in their parties. To prevent the migration of these elements to the communists, leftist leadership is being created for them. The leftists are engaged in demagoguery to satisfy the opposition from below, the rightists at the same time keep in their hands the party leadership and steer it in their direction. In such perfidious and crooked way they cheat people in order to keep the opposition elements within their party and not to let them come over to the communists. Of course, there are some good and sincere people in the opposition, but they do not lead the opposition.

[Thorez stressed that the CC FCP decided, in the spirit of the conference of the nine parties, to organize at factories and plants alliances in defense of independence of France, using to this purpose the CGT (Confederation General de Travail). According to Thorez, the FCP succeeded at the last conference of the CGT in winning a majority against the Marshall Plan and American imperialism.]

Com. Stalin says that the struggle against the Marshall Plan should not be put up too crudely. The Socialists will say that the communists are against accepting loans from Americans. The answer should be: no, not against. Communists are for loans, but on such conditions that will not harm the national sovereignty. Communists are against the enslaving conditions that impinge upon independence of France. This is how the Communists should formulate the issue ... Com. Stalin points out that the socialists are selling their nation [rodinu] down the river.

. . . Thorez says that, in connection with the conference of the nine communist parties, he would like to touch on one issue that pertains more to the past than to the future. The FCP admitted justified criticism of its shortcomings and, in particular, the criticism that it could not quickly and decisively unmask the plans of American imperialism. However, at the last congress the FCP did draw attention to the menacing character of American imperialism. The French Communist Party expanded self-criticism and is seeking to correct its shortcomings. However, representatives of some fraternal communist parties sometimes subjected the FCP to unfair criticism. For instance, in particular the Yugoslav comrades reproached the French Communist Party that it had joined the resistance struggle all too late and could not ensure the people's power at the moment of France 's liberation. Thorez says that, in his opinion, this criticism is not justified. In order to gain a chance to correctly inform the party masses of France and not to disorient them, Thorez would like to know the opinion of com. Stalin on this issue. Thorez says that the French Communist Party was the first party who had engaged in struggle even as early as 1939, defending its country against the German invasion. During the occupation of France the Communist Party led the armed struggle against the Germans. Even such a renowned enemy of the Communist Party as de Gaulle does not dispute the fact that at the end of the occupation the Communist Party was the only force who organized armed resistance to the Germans. The fact that the French Communist Party failed to seize power during the liberation of the country in August 1944 is explained by a whole number of reasons of an international nature. The French Communist Party at that time directed its efforts to advocate the speediest opening of the second front, intensification of the war and bringing closer a victory over Germany. The French Communist Party was in the rearguard of American and British armed forces.

Com. Stalin says that it would be completely different story had the Red Army been positioned in France.

Thorez says that at that time de Gaulle whose prestige was still unchallenged, wanted to provoke the Communist Party to start an armed uprising. Yet, the Communist Party of France did not walk into this [trap] (ne poshla na eto). It did not want to see itself weakened and isolated. The Party managed to unmask before the people a true face of de Gaulle, this rabid reactionary and fascist. Thorez says that, of course, the French Communist Party committed errors, but its general line in that period was, in his opinion, correct.

Com. Stalin says that the French communists could not seize power at that time. Even had they seized it, they would have lost it then, because of the presence of Anglo-American troops in the country.

. . . Com. Stalin says that the Yugoslav comrades work very well, but they owe much to the fact that their country was liberated by the Red Army. Had Churchill been late by one year with opening of the second front in Northern France, the Red Army would have come to France. Com. Stalin says that we [in Moscow] toyed with an idea of reaching Paris (dobratsia do Parizha).

Thorez says that when the Anglo-Americans landed in France, they did not so much to defeat Germany, but mostly to occupy strongholds in Western Europe.

Com. Stalin says that, of course, the Anglo-Americans could not afford such a scandal, so that the Red Army would liberate Paris while they would sit on the shores of Africa.

Thorez says that he can assure com. Stalin that the French people would have enthusiastically received the Red Army.

Com. Stalin observes that then it would have been quite a different picture . . .

Com. Stalin remarks that the French Communist Party has never approached the VKP(b) with request of assistance and jocularly adds that they are perhaps afraid of assistance. Com. Stalin says that the VKP (b) has material capabilities to come to assistance, whenever it is necessary.

Thorez responds that the French Communist Party is in good financial situation and possesses of large funds. Even before the war it had 20 million francs. Today this sum has grown considerably.

[Then Stalin inquires if the French communists have stockpiles of arms. Do they consider it necessary to have them.]

Thorez responds that the CC of the French Communist Party authorized two comrades, one from the Politburo, another from the CC, to deal specifically with this issue. Those selected [for the task] are Lequeur, who was secretary of the Communist Party organization of Paris during the occupation, and Tillon, the organizer of the guerrilla movement in France. They conduct work among old guerrillas, create organizations of paramilitary nature. French Communist Party managed to conceal a whole number of depots with armaments and ammunition.

Com. Stalin says that one must have armaments and organization if one does not want to become disarmed before the enemy. Communists can be attacked and then they should fight back. There can be all kinds of situations. Com. Stalin says that we [the Soviets] have arms and we can give it, if it becomes necessary.

Com. Stalin asks if one could establish permanent communication with the French Communist Party, for instance, by radio. Com. Suslov says that some radio communication with the French Communist Party exists. The French [communists] have a radio operator trained in Moscow.

Thorez remarks that the French communists have several radio stations.

Com Stalin asks if [Jaque] Duclos is a good assistant to Thorez. Com. Stalin says that the speech of Duclos in the Chamber [of the National Assembly] with a declaration that the working class will not be provoked into armed insurrection was not a good one. One should keep in mind that the enemy will not spare the weak and the unarmed.

Thorez responds that Duclos is a very good worker and works a lot, but sometimes he takes liberty of speaking in the Chamber without sufficient preliminary preparation. Therefore there are instances when he gets provoked and speaks not what he planned. Nevertheless Duclos is a good and intelligence communist.

Com. Molotov asks if there are vacillations inside the CC French Communist Party in connection to the decisions of the conference of the nine communist parties.

Thorez responds that there were such vacillations in the CC FCP. In particular Andre Marti adopted a wrong stance. This does not surprise he, Thorez, for Andre Marti, even though he is a brave fighter, imbued with revolutionary spirit, and gives much credence to formal logic. He does not grasp at once all kinds of sharp turns and complex situations. This time he even spoke at the CC with a separate report about the conference of the nine parties and declared that, in his opinion, the enemy number one is de Gaulle. Thorez says that he explained to Marti that the enemy number one is American imperialism that has its agents in France such as de Gaulle, the MRP and the socialists. The issue about erroneous stand of Marti was discussed at the Politburo. Marti was not happy with this. But on the next morning he spoke to a meeting of the communist organization in Paris and gave a very good and correct speech about the conference of the nine. Thorez says that Marti is a disciplined comrade. However, he is a bit hot-headed and one should have maximum patience in dealing with him.

Thorez says that Marcel Cachin is a remarkable figure of the Communist Party,

although he is already 80 year old. He is a very energetic and active communist, but he somehow came to believe that if he is a member in the commission of foreign affairs at the National Assembly, he can then almost guide the entire foreign policy. Marcel Cachin is one of the greatest friends of the U SSR. For him what the Russians say is the law.

Com. Stalin says if some relapses for the past (retsidivi proshlogo) can be observed with Cachin [In 1939-40 Cachin refused to support the new Comintern line unconditionally in support of the Nazi-Soviet pact].

Thorez says that there are no relapses can be observed in his case.

Com. Stalin says that in the French Communist Party there is comrade Montmoussot who is too much intimidating the French bourgeoisie with strikes. He declared, for instance, a general strike. Nobody went on strike, but he declared it.

Thorez says that Montmoussot is a close friend of Frachon, a man loyal to the party.

Thorez says that there are good cadres growing from out of the ranks of the young comrades. The best among them is Fajon. As early as 1940 he spoke at the National Assembly with a wonderful speech in the spirit of Liebknecht. He is presently busy with the issues of education and ideological work. Raymond Guillot, former Comsomol secretary, is also a good comrade. At the moment he works as secretary of the communist organization of the Parisian district. He is young in age, but a very gifted and experienced communist."