

The French Popular Front, 1934-9

1. Chronology.

- 1934 - 6 February, riots by extreme right turn into assault on French Parliament. Centre-left government (under Daladier) falls; replaced by centre-right.
- 12 February, general strike called by the moderate trade union movement (CGT) against the 'fascist' threat to the Republic.
 - June, French Communist Party (PCF) changes from 'class against class' to a broad alliance of democratic forces against fascism. Pact of cooperation between Socialist Party (SFIO) and PCF, beginning Popular Front.
- 1935 - Radical Party (main centre-left party) joins Popular Front. Bastille Day (14th July) is a demonstration of popular support for the Popular Front. Centre-right Doumergue government with policy of fiscal retrenchment.
- 1936 - January, electoral pact of Popular Front parties (PCF, SFIO, Radicals) and limited reform programme of eventual government.
- March, Hitler reoccupies German Rhineland (permanently de-militarized under Versailles Treaty). Moderate trade union body (CGT) and Communist trade union body (CGTU) amalgamate.
 - April-May, elections give Popular Front parties a narrow majority.
 - May-June, spontaneous wave of strikes and sit-ins (2.5 million strikers).
 - June, Popular Front government takes office (SFIO and Radicals, backed by PCF in parliament), with Léon Blum as prime minister. Matignon agreement (brokered by state between CGT and employers) ends strikes, giving workers wage increases, collective bargaining, 40 hour week. Two weeks' paid holidays legislated. Right-wing leagues banned: the Croix de Feu becomes a political party, the Parti Social Français.
 - September, French (and British) non-intervention in support of Republic in Spanish Civil War (began July).
 - October, devaluation of the franc.
- 1937 - February, police fire on left-wing supporter of the Popular Front protesting against illegal right-wing demonstration at Clichy (Paris). 'Pause' in social reform programme, due to inflation and sluggish economy.
- June, Blum's demand for special decree laws to resume economic reform rejected by Radical Party in Senate. Fall of Popular Front government. Replaced by Radical-led governments within the same parliamentary majority.
- 1938 - April, German annexation of Austria.
- September, Munich accord, partitioning Czechoslovakia, signed by Edouard Daladier, Radical prime minister, Neville Chamberlain. Opposed only by PCF in parliament.
 - October, general strike called by CGT against breaches by government of 40 hour week and other social legislation of 1936. Strike crushed.
- 1939 - August, Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact. PCF banned.
- France declares war on Germany after invasion of Poland.

2. France and the Depression.

1) French production (1938 = 100)

	Overall	Food industries	Textiles	Metallurgy	Engineering
1929	121	102	120	151	150
1932	90	111	88	85	93
1934	95	108	94	94	100
1935	94	110	96	95	98

2) Value of different forms of real income (ie. in terms of cost of living), 1929-35.

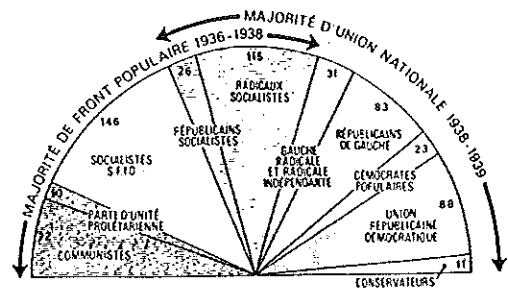
Wages and salaries	- 6%	Pensions	+46%
Farm incomes	-32%	Business profits	-18%
Liberal professions	+ 7%	Stocks & shares	- 3%
Real estate	+12%	Overall	- 8.5%

3. Elections and parliament: 1932 - 1940.

1) Votes cast, general elections of 1932 and 1936.

	1932	1936
Voting	9,579,482	9,847,266
Communists	783,098	1,468,949
Socialists	2,034,124	1,996,667
Radicals	2,315,008	1,955,174
Right	4,307,865	4,223,928

2) The parliament of 1936-40.



4. Political parties .

Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party = PCF). Founded December 1920 by breaking away from Socialists and adhering to Third (Moscow) International, or Comintern. **Socialist Party** (Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière = French Section of the Worker International = SFIO). Founded 1905; with formation of PCF, it became a Marxist but essentially reformist party, committed to parliamentary means. Retained an important revolutionary left.

Parti Radical et Radical Socialiste (Radical Party). Founded in 1901 in wake of Dreyfus Affair. Key centre-left Republican party, expressing support of lower middle class, rural, and small-town France for the Republican political tradition and the Third Republic as a regime. **Fédération Républicaine** (Republican Federation). Most important and conservative of centre-right Republican parties. Catholic links; bitterly opposed to the Popular Front. Shared support with extreme-right, extra-parliamentary leagues, especially the Croix de Feu.

Croix de Feu. Most important of extreme right leagues and parties that flourished in 1930s. Founded 1938. Converted into parliamentary party (Parti Social Français = French Social Party) in 1936. Never contested a general election. More authoritarian than fascist; called for strong government. Leader was Colonel François de la Rocque.

5. Key figures.

Blum, Léon (1872-1950). Born in Republican Parisian-Jewish family. Intellectual, socialist and supporter of Jean Jaurès, whose mantle he inherited in the inter-war Socialist Party (SFIO), after the split with the Communists in 1920. Parliamentary, reformist socialist. Prime minister of the Popular Front government, June 1936-June 1937, and briefly in 1938. Tried by Vichy and imprisoned in Buchenwald.

Daladier, Edouard (1884-1970). Son of a baker in the Midi (Vaucluse). Scholarship boy and FWW veteran. Deputy for the Vaucluse in inter-war period. Leader of the Radical Party from 1933. Prime minister 1933-4, deputy PM and Defence Minister in Popular Front government; opposed intervention in Spain. Prime minister 1938-40.

De la Rocque, François. Retired lieutenant-colonel and businessman (petroleum and electricity industries). Extreme right leader of the Croix de Feu.

Thorez, Maurice (1900-64). Born in mining town in the north (Pas-de-Calais). Briefly a miner and then clerk. Founder member of PCF in 1920. 1930 became First Secretary. Loyal supporter of Moscow. Became undisputed leader in 1934 and implemented Moscow directions for a 'Popular Front' policy to save the Third Republic and secure an anti-fascist alliance with the USSR. Moderated strikes in 1936 and supported Blum government without participating in it. Switched position with Nazi-Soviet pact, August 1939; spent war in USSR.