Chapter III

From the Second Front to the Fourth Term

One of the most critical phases of our war effort was the delay in opening the Second Front in the west through France. For a time this threatened to defeat the Roosevelt-Stalin war strategy.

At the time this issue was thoroughly misrepresented by most of the daily newspapers in America. Probably few persons, outside of those whose special business it is to follow such questions closely, have any clear idea of its true significance. It was discussed before the country as an issue between Britain and America on one side and the Soviet Union on the other. The Second Front was considered a special and exclusive interest of the Soviet Union. Those Americans who spoke out for the Second Front were called "Communists" or "fellow travelers." In truth, behind this deceptive newspaper talk, the issue was the most significant example of Soviet-American agreement and unity.

In May, 1942, V. M. Molotov, Soviet Foreign Minister, went to London to confer with the British government. As a result there was announced a twenty-year treaty of alliance between the two governments. Mr. Molotov proceeded to Washington where the Lend-lease agreement was signed, and it was announced that discussions in the two capitals had resulted in an agreement on

the urgent necessity for the western powers to open the Second Front.

Thereafter months passed and no signs appeared of the Second Front or even of its urgent preparation. The war was going badly everywhere except on the Soviet front where the Nazis had been stopped and were being driven back. Questions were raised here and elsewhere, but no satisfactory answers were forthcoming. The questions rose to demands. Uneasiness at the unexplained delay changed to protests. Before long there was something of a mass movement, with street demonstrations, resolutions, and deputations, asking for the realization of the promised Second Front, forcing the question into the open for public discussion.

It is typical of the role of most American newspapers in discussing the Soviet Union, that during 1942 and 1943 they thoroughly misinformed the public about the Second Front. If they had merely refused to discuss the issue in public, it might have been legitimately defended on the ground that the enemy should not be informed of dissension among the Allied high commands. But almost unanimously American newspapers poured forth a flood of argument designed to prove that the Second Front was impractical, that it had never really been promised, that it was a special Soviet demand that went contrary to the judgment and interests of both Britain and America, that all the military experts were against it, etc., etc.—the full and complete Churchill case with trimmings. The enemy was fully informed of Allied dissensions, but the American people were misinformed.

They were told that the dissensions were between ourselves and the Soviet Union.

As a matter of fact, which is today of public record, President Roosevelt never wavered from the position taken from the beginning that the only possible Anglo-American course for the rapid and complete defeat of the Nazis was the invasion of the Continent through France and that all other operations were secondary and subordinate. This was the decisive American view, concurred in by political and military authorities and fully shared by our Soviet Allies. The British government, dominated by Churchill, dissented from this program and refused to carry it out, receiving the support of anti-Soviet circles in America.

What the American newspapers were doing, therefore, was fighting against the basic strategy of the American government under the guise of opposing a Soviet measure.

This created distrust and suspicion on the Soviet side against America, for the facts made a *prima-facie* case of double-dealing and bad faith; the newspapers created a similar distrust in America against the Soviet Union by representing that a sharp conflict existed when actually there was full agreement; it comforted the Axis, which was mainly speculating on Allied disunity as its hope for final victory.

My own experience during the fight for the Soviet-American policy of the Second Front is, I believe, of more than narrow personal interest. I had been sent to prison during the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist hysteria that swept America in 1939 after the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact was announced, primarily because I had, as spokesman for American Communists, defended that pact as the only recourse Britain and France had left to the Soviet Union by their double-dealing and hostile relations. (The formal charge against me, based upon my travel under assumed names in Europe and Asia during the period 1921–1933, was a mere pretext, since the facts were long known to the government. Indeed, the government itself admitted in its brief before the Supreme Court that the charges were purely technical and did not involve any issue of moral turpitude.) * In May, 1942, I was released from prison by Presidential Order "in the interest of national unity." I resumed my post as head of the Communist Party at the moment when agreement on "the urgency of the Second Front" was announced. My party was, of course, energetically in support of the Soviet-American agreement.

As the months passed and there was no Second Front, however, suspicions began to mount that the American government was equally responsible with the British for double-crossing the Soviet Union and was, for that reason, abandoning the only sound military strategy. The situation was becoming very dangerous by the middle of 1943. These suspicions were shared rather strongly in the American Communist leadership, and I was myself deeply disturbed.

It was at this point I was informed, and convinced myself it was true, that President Roosevelt and his mili-

* Document No. 287, *In the Supreme Court of the United States*, October Term, 1940, pp. 13-14.

tary advisers were thoroughly committed to the strategy of the Second Front and would carry it into effect as soon as they could overcome British obstructions. The President could not engage in public polemics with Churchill, but it would not hurt the cause if others, without official responsibility, placed the delay of the Second Front where it properly belonged. He was presently engaged in preparing a more comprehensive understanding with the Soviet Union which would already begin laying the foundations for an enduring peace.

When I had satisfied myself that this was truly the position of the President, I thenceforth bent all my efforts to strengthen his hand and to dispel all suspicion that he was a participant in the attempted double cross of the Soviet Union.

This was not an easy job. There was no evidence available on the public record to refute the suspicions. Indeed, with the Quebec Conference in August the evidence seemed in the other direction, for the newspapers interpreted it as a scene of triumph for Churchill and his policy. My own confidence in the President was firm, but I had no evidence to convince my colleagues who were beginning to talk of the necessity for public denunciation of the President. I had to hold the line for several months by sheer authority, an unstable position at best for the leader of a political party. The crisis among the Communists reflected the crisis among nations and within nations, the most serious crisis of the war.

In September I took the issue openly to the public. Addressing a mass meeting in Chicago's Municipal

Opera House, I said that President Roosevelt and General Marshall were convinced that the Second Front was necessary at once, but that it was being held up by Churchill. I showed that to blame the delay upon Roosevelt only helped Churchill to succeed in his obstructionism, that it was necessary to place the responsibility where it belonged, at No. 10 Downing Street and not at the White House.

Fortunately for the handling of my own inner-party problems, William Randolph Hearst received a flash-wire report on this speech, called for its full text immediately by telegraph, and within a few hours had issued special editions of all his papers from coast to coast, denouncing me and demanding the suppression of the Communist Party. This outer storm served to prevent an inner one from developing in the Communist Party. But soon afterward I received a letter from a leading Communist in London, protesting against my speech, indicating the belief that both governments shared equally responsibility for delaying the Second Front, and gently hinting that American Communists should concentrate on correcting the sins of their own government. I felt sure enough of my position to pocket that letter, since it was a personal one, without informing my colleagues of it. I was afraid (justly so, as I later learned) that such a letter from abroad might serve to upset our whole policy in the midst of the most important diplomatic negotiations the world has ever known.

During this period our domestic political relationships in America became seriously confused. Labor, both CIO and AFL, was drawing away from the President.

The articulate liberals and New Dealers were openly accusing Roosevelt of "betrayal" of the New Deal program by his giving precedence to the war effort over domestic problems. The outlook for the 1944 elections was dark. A part of the liberal criticism of the President took the form of a blistering attack against his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull. It was an "open secret" that Hull was probably going to Moscow, and a prominent columnist in "predicting" this event went on to describe the Secretary of State as one who was irreconcilably hostile to the Soviet Union and, therefore, likely to fail in such a mission. At this moment when Roosevelt was preparing for Hull to go to Moscow, as the first move in his successful effort to subordinate Churchill to the Soviet-American program, the Hull-Welles controversy broke into the open with most of our liberals and progressives taking the side of Welles and opposing Hull. I considered it necessary to support Hull energetically and did so, at the price of bringing a tempest in a teapot down upon my head from the liberals. There was as well some lifting of eyebrows among my own Communists.

I never had cause to regret my support of Hull. He did a magnificent job in laying the foundations of Teheran, he never wavered in applying the Roosevelt course, and, on Roosevelt's death, although he was himself retired and in a hospital, he rose from his sickbed to castigate the reneging on Roosevelt's commitments attempted by the American delegation at San Francisco.

A few weeks after the Teheran Conference, *Collier's* magazine published an article by George Creel, designed

to win Hull away from the Roosevelt line; for that purpose he mentioned my name as being the "man behind the scenes" who had organized the liberal criticisms of Hull. I had to counter this sabotage with a letter to *Collier's*, released to the newspapers, denying this reference to myself as untrue and expressing the hope that Mr. Hull would continue in office for many years. I was glad to know later on that the President had noted my defense of Hull and considered it of substantial help.

The Conference of Teheran at the end of 1943 finally settled the issue of the Second Front and brought the British, however reluctantly, into line. The year-and-a-half struggle ended in victory for the Soviet-American strategy. Some six months later the Second Front was opened, almost simultaneously with the opening of the American presidential campaign that ended with Roosevelt's fourth election. It was the fight for the Second Front and the whole strategy it typified which had made necessary and inevitable that Roosevelt should receive a fourth term.

The Second Front swept rapidly toward victory when finally launched. The delay had made it more costly, but nonetheless the action, when undertaken, fully justified the military judgment of General Marshall and General Eisenhower as well as the political judgment of Roosevelt.

In August of 1943, amidst the crisis in the fight for the Second Front, it became clear that to win this fight it would be necessary to merge it with another one, the fight for the fourth term for Roosevelt.

As long as it was expected that Roosevelt would re-

tire from office after the 1944 election, there was a serious weakness in his position which encouraged every kind of opposition to his war strategy. After all, so the argument ran, Roosevelt broke America's most ancient and hallowed political tradition once, when he ran for a third term; such a thing could not be repeated, they said. And since Roosevelt will soon be out of office, isn't it better not to get entangled in a fight against Churchill for his policies? Roosevelt will be out before the peace is made, so why engage now in efforts to determine post-war solutions and alignments? Better to stick to the good old reliable British lead in foreign affairs. The British, after all, never change their foreign policies, however much they may change their administrations.

This was a nasty and stubborn problem. Because it dealt with men to whom policy and principle were secondary, and playing safe for their personal careers took first place, there was only one way to solve it. That was to make such men understand that the only safe place was on the side of Roosevelt's principles and the dangerous place was in the direction of appeasing his enemies. That point could only be impressed on them by thoroughly disposing, already in 1943, of the idea that F.D.R. would automatically retire with the 1944 election. It was necessary to launch the movement for the fourth term.

At first the proposal drew a blank. Liberal circles were busy sniping at the President in the hope of forcing him to shift his emphasis away from the war to domestic New Dealism. They were oblivious to the tremendous consequences of Roosevelt's struggle with

Churchill (they were hardly aware there was such a struggle going on) and did not see that if Churchill's policy won out there would be nothing left of the New Deal and little of western progressivism. Labor leaders privately admitted that Roosevelt was their one best hope, but insisted that they must withhold all commitments on this question until the last possible moment, in order to use the issue as a bargaining counter in gaining concessions for their organizations.

But the fourth term movement was demanded by history itself. There was no other way. It was as inevitable as the movement for the Second Front out of which it arose. It was as necessary as the struggle against the Churchill policy. Men willing to take up this issue energetically could draw to their aid ten thousand small rivulets of influence which would quickly unite in an irresistible political stream.

These considerations made a few supporters of Roosevelt bold. They decided that if the ball were started rolling it would set loose a political chain reaction that nothing would be able to stop. So they went out into various states and localities, held informal conferences and discussions with the lower strata of trade union leaders, talked with local officials, ward and city politicians. They told everyone that this was the political bandwagon, that the fact that the time was early and the wagon largely empty was merely their fortunate opportunity to occupy choice seats on it. They stirred up the rank and file. It was a movement from below, of the common people, without a single national organization mobilized behind it when it was launched.

It worked. By January, 1944, even the Democratic National Committee rushed to occupy front seats on the bandwagon, although six months before its members had been deep in a score of favorite son movements in anticipation of Roosevelt's retirement. Roosevelt himself was still considering 1944 as his last year in office. But the grass roots had been stirred. The masses had spoken and the party leaders accepted their decision.

It remained for F.D.R. himself to be convinced, not so much that he should run, but rather that if he did run he would be elected. For it would be fatal to his policies to be a defeated candidate. Rather than risk defeat perhaps he should retire as the successful President who charted the course to victory, but left the making of peace to a successor. Besides the President had neither the time nor the strength for the problems of an election campaign in addition to the pressing ones of war. There were so many, many, strong arguments why Roosevelt should not consent to run for the fourth term! But whatever he might decide, the movement among the masses had already made support for his policies the only safe course for those whose motto is play safe.

Such were some of the technical aspects of American politics and policy making even in the midst of war. Before Roosevelt's time, it was the reactionaries who utilized this aspect of politics against the people. F.D.R. taught us also to use them for the people against the reactionaries. In both war and politics the ability to register a majority support for the correct policy is profoundly important. Even a correct policy is not worth very much until it is put into practice.