

(continued from previous page)

of government reform, on the theatre, and one (*Du Mariage*) on more personal human relations, which is still remembered against him in some conservative quarters for the views on equality of the sexes which he expressed in it.

The Dreyfus Case

The Dreyfus case, which divided France into two camps between 1897 and 1906, dragged Blum from the quiet salons into the turmoil of the streets. He became a *Dreyfusard*. At the same time he came under the influence of Jaurès, orator and architect of modern French socialism—and, through Jaurès, under the influence of Marx. In 1906 Blum and Jaurès founded *L'Humanité* as a daily socialist newspaper. It may be noted at this point that in a country where, until the days of the Resistance, the venality of the Press was taken for granted, *L'Humanité* (latterly communist) and the royalist *Action Française* were in the opinion of competent observers, the only two papers which could be called honest by our standards.

Assassination of Jaurès

Working together, Blum and Jaurès wrote and spoke for socialism until 1914. In that year Jaurès was assassinated, just before the outbreak of war. A month later Blum entered political life, more as a gesture to the memory of his friend than from personal inclination. The same year he became *chef du cabinet* to the Coalition Minister of Public Works and in 1919 was elected as one of the deputies for Paris.

From that time onward his influence as leader of the socialists in the Chamber grew steadily, and long before he actually became premier he held a commanding position. But he would not accept office other than on his own terms, and the only administrative experience he had had when he took over in 1936 was that gained in the early stages of the 1914-18 war.

Forty-Hour Week

Whatever France may have thought of Blum before, once he gained power he did not leave room for doubt about his ability as an administrator. With an almost breathless speed he set about the business of reform. His first measures established a 40-hour week in industry, guaranteed labour the right to collective bargaining, to a minimum wage, and to holidays with pay. The school leaving age was raised, wages and salary cuts made by Laval were partially restored, pensions were reorganised and the administration of the Bank of France was reformed. Six months later Blum devalued the franc and for a time France took the depreciation of her currency fairly well. But in July, 1937, following a complicated crisis, the financial situation deteriorated, and (following a defeat in the Senate) Blum resigned. The new government was still of the Popular Front and Blum remained as vice-premier under Chautemps, but except for a brief two months (March-April, 1938) he did not again lead the Government. Right up to the fall of France in

1940, however, he was a dominant figure in French politics.

It was rumoured after the fall of France that he had left the country—his last public appearance had been at Vichy on July 12, when he voted against the Petain dictatorship—but on September 15 of the same year he joined Daladier and Reynaud in "administrative custody." With other leaders of the Popular Front he was put on trial at Riom by the Vichy administration in an attempt to discredit the democratic institutions of the Third Republic. Later he was held prisoner by the Nazis in Germany, and did not return to the French scene until May, 1945.

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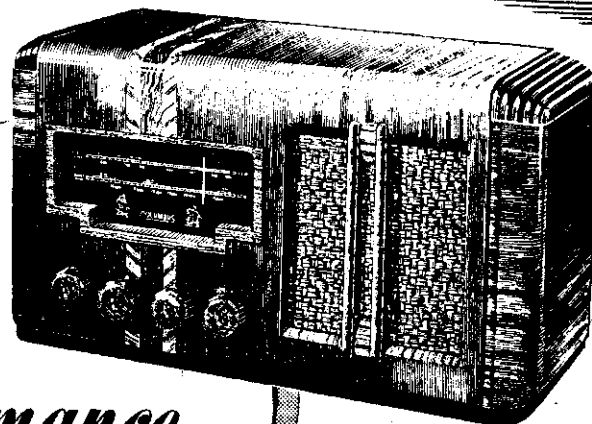
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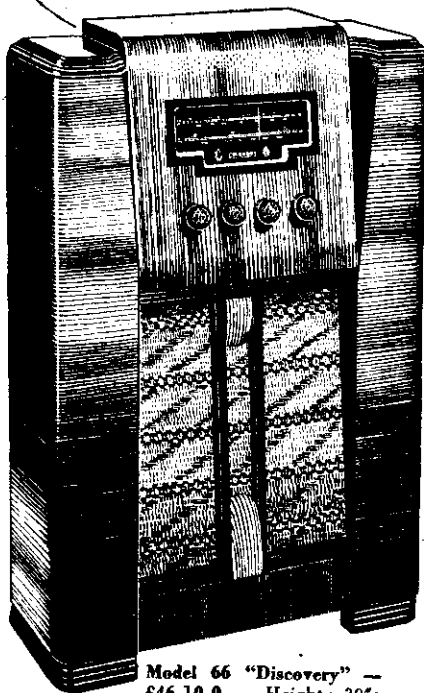
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