

Adieu Beaux Jours:
The 1937 Exposition Internationale and the Eclipse of French Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Traditionally, the 1937 Paris Exposition Internationale has been relegated as a topic of study in the field of art history. The purpose of this research paper is to explore the salient political issues surrounding the planning and implementing of the exposition, particularly the foreign policy of France's Popular Front government. The exposition opened during a period of tense international relations, given the Civil War raging in Spain to the south and the continual threat that such a civil war could have broken out in France. The research derives from numerous secondary source books and primary source materials, including French and American diplomatic documents, French newspaper, memoirs, photographs, pieces of art and the official guidebook of the Nazi German pavilion at the Exposition. This paper argues that while Léon Blum and the Popular Front government attempted to use the 1937 Exposition as a moment to assert French strength, unity and dedication to peace on the continent, political and artistic disorganization at the Expo doomed the goals of the government. The aim of this research is to elevate the importance of the '37 Exposition in the historical narrative of the Interwar years and the lead-up to the Second World War.

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*“Curieuse année 1937, décidément, tantôt triste et, quoi qu'il en soit, souvent déroutante...Alors, qu'est-ce que tout cela signifie, pause et non-intervention et fusillades et démission? C'est l'adieu aux beaux jours? Vraiment? Si vite? Si mal?”*¹

Paris has long had a reputation for being a city of splendid beauty and subtle charm. However, in the summer of 1937, there was very little subtlety in the skyline along the Seine. Paris was hosting the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*. The eyes of the world thus turned to Paris, but their attention was not on France. Three towers pierced the blue skies of Paris in the summer of '37: the Eiffel Tower, a holdover from the 1889 World's Fair, and the intimidating edifices of the pavilions of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. For most, the symbolism was impossible to miss. The view from the *esplanade* of the new *Palais de Chaillot* visually represented the political climate throughout Europe in the 1930s. The eyes of this international audience beheld the seemingly outdated system of parliamentary democracy in France, represented by the Eiffel Tower, sandwiched between the opposing poles of fascism and communism that threatened to tear the continent apart. One political cartoon published at the time depicted the statue of the proletarian couple atop the Soviet pavilion lashing out, in the process tipping their tower, towards the squawking Nazi Eagle across the walkway.² Beneath the clashing statues, the terrified crowd looks on mesmerized or flees, some even jumping into the Seine.³ The caption reads, “At the Exposition: once again, these two are the ones fighting.”⁴ In spite of the joyous, funfair atmosphere, here was the great ideological and political debate of the decade starkly presented for all to see in the City of Lights.

¹ Roger Bordier, *36 La Fete* (Paris: Éditions Messidor, 1985), 114.

² A. Dubout, “At the Exposition: once again, these two are the ones fighting,” *Candide*, 15 July 1937 in James D. Herbert., *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 27.

³ Dubout.

⁴ Dubout.

Not two miles away down the Seine, at the *Quai d'Orsay*, the home of the *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the diplomatic corps of France struggled with the political realities of this ideological fight. The year before, bloody civil war broke out in France's neighbor to the south, Spain, between the Soviet-backed Loyalists and the Nazi-backed Nationalists. Visitors to Republican Spain's pavilion could get a taste for the cruelty of this conflict, particularly towards civilians, in the display of the new masterwork by Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*. Greater public awareness complicated matters for a foreign ministry that was attempting to steer a middle course through the maelstrom of the Spanish conflict. As the record of diplomatic communiqués reveal, "it is therefore the events of Spain that take the dominant place in the preoccupations of the governments" in 1937.⁵ Would it be possible for France to show the world at the Exposition that they were the nation to assure the peace, in spite of the Spanish bloodletting?

Playing host to innumerable foreign dignitaries and tourists brought Paris prestige in 1937, but with this distinction came the pressure to present the nation to an international audience of both allies and antagonists. As the French ambassador to Germany stated, "All summer the Paris Exposition...attracted a number of German tourists, including many less prominent Nazi leaders, most of whom had never been in France. They discovered Paris with manifest pleasure and, at their return, Hitler sought to obtain minute information about all they observed."⁶ There was much more at stake here than entertaining the masses or showing off new artwork and products. This was just as much a political exposition as it was an aesthetic. It was an opportunity for political showmanship; a chance to flex "soft-power" muscle and to make a

⁵ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, 2eme Série (1936-1939), Tome V (20 Février-31 Mai 1937)* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1968), vii.

⁶ André François-Poncet, *The Fateful Years: Memoirs of a French Ambassador in Berlin, 1931-1938*, Trans. Jacques LeClerq (London: Victor Gollance Ltd., 1949), 212.

case for political and cultural superiority. This paper seeks to link the political and diplomatic history of France in the 1930s to the *Exposition Internationale* in a way not yet approached by historians.

The study of the exposition has long been relegated to the field of art history. Naturally, the exposition offers art historians numerous examples of art, architecture and consumer goods to examine and interpret. Most all of the book-length studies of the 1937 exposition emerge from the academic fields of art, architecture and design, including James Herbert's *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, Shanny Peer's *France on Display* and Karen Fiss' *Grand Illusion*. While not without merit, the works of art historians take a different approach to academic research and place emphasis on themes and topics only of incidental interest to historians. This is most explicitly seen in Herbert's book, which argues that the 1937 expo failed to "truly represent the world."⁷ Herbert's argument is muddled, to say the least, by overuse of art jargon. Lay readers and professional scholars of history alike might have difficulty getting through passages such as:

Thus while the various displays of global scope perched along the Seine over the period of one year may have indulged in unbridled hubris, that conviction necessarily engendered as its own perfect complement a potential incertitude in the inevitable mismatch between the world and its iteration in representation.⁸

Those in the field of history have little use in their research for discussions of the utilization of space and "transcendent subjects."⁹ Historians likely do not know what these terms mean, and find little utility in applying them to their own studies. Moreover, Herbert's main focus is actually on artwork and cinema; therefore, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* offers little with which political or diplomatic historians can engage. While this vacuum in the research allows

⁷ Herbert, 3.

⁸ Herbert, 28.

⁹ Herbert, 26.

this paper to explore the exposition in a new light, it also makes writing an extensive historiography on the 1937 Exposition a difficult task.

Diplomatic historians of Interwar France, for their part, have focused most of their attention on the big events leading up to the Second World War: the violation of the Locarno Treaty by the re-militarization of the Rhineland, the Anschluss, and the Munich Agreement. Any mention of the *Exposition* in these books is typically only in passing, as an interesting sideshow to the main events. Authors in the field, including Anthony Adamthwaite and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, have overlooked this important event in the history of both Paris and international events for some seemingly inexplicable reason. Perhaps this is so because at first glance the exposition, in spite of its international moniker, seems so provincial. In a way, the Exposition does come across as a topic for historians of Paris only. Or perhaps it has marginalized because it does lend itself to the study of art and architecture so well. Whatever the reason may be, it seems that given the way in which politics influenced even the most mundane of decisions in the 1930s, it is safe to say that scholars have previously missed a great opportunity. To be fair, Karen Fiss came closest to achieving this hybrid approach of history and art history, however her book failed to fully contextualize the exposition with the diplomatic back and forth of the era, and instead it reverted once again to exploring primary sources from art and cinema.

The intention of this paper, therefore, is to elevate the 1937 *Exposition* in importance in the study of France and the whole of Europe in the thirties. The Exposition, this paper argues, was more than just a cultural event, for the way in which France presented itself to the world in 1937 sheds much light on its eventual descent towards war and occupation. The biggest stars in the capital of France that summer were not French. The worldviews that were most powerfully projected were not French. They were the alien worldviews of Stalinism and more importantly,

National Socialism. In this moment, long before the retreat from Dunkerque and the rise of Vichy, we see the eclipse of French foreign policy and the waning of France's influence on world affairs.

Two particular factors complicate research in French foreign policy in this era. The first, in the words of French historian Anthony Adamthwaite, is that "for British policy after 1916 there is a plethora of sources, official and private. By comparison, French governmental and private archives are meager. Many foreign office files were lost or destroyed in WWII."¹⁰ This paper will draw from what documents did remain, officially released by the French government in the 1960s in a multivolume series. A second difficulty arises from trying to define a coherent foreign policy of France during the 1930s. Given its Parliamentary system of government, the French Third Republic went through volatile shifts in political party leadership, especially in its waning years. Unstable coalitions bred unstable premierships and unstable premierships swiftly brought about new coalitions. Between 1932 and 1940, France had eleven Prime Ministers and ten Foreign Ministers, a fact that muddles any attempt to define a singular French foreign policy.¹¹ Yet, in spite of this constant political turnover, in regards to the most pressing issue of the 1930s, France's relationship with Germany, there tended to be a common theme running from one government to the next. "The principle aim of French foreign policy was the search for an agreement with Germany," it has been written; "French prime ministers from Blum to Daladier worked consistently for an understanding with Hitler."¹² In other words, most any form of acceptance from the Führer would mark a French success by the *Quai d'Orsay*. Any assurance that Hitler would not start another war would be cause for celebration.

¹⁰ Anthony P. Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914-1940* (London; New York: Arnold, 1995), ix.

¹¹ Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1994), 111.

¹² Anthony P. Adamthwaite, *France and the Coning of the Second World War, 1936-1939* (London, 1977), 353.

Apart from these complications specific to research in French foreign policy, there are other probable culprits responsible for the lack of strong research in this area. Given that the 1937 Exposition was an international event and featured the participation from nearly every major country, there are likely many primary sources yet unexplored, written in languages not traditionally known by French historians. An unmistakable flaw for French historians researching this topic has likely been the inability to track down and read Soviet documents in Russian or other foreign languages not readily known to European historians. Such is a limitation for this paper, as well, and therefore France's foreign policy with Germany is largely explored to the detriment of research of their policies towards Spain, the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe. With luck, the research for this paper will reveal just how much more there is to be known about the politics of the 1937 Exposition. However, it is fair to argue that the question of Germany remains the most salient for France in the 1930s, even at the exposition.

Because the preparations for and the opening of the Exposition occurred under the first government of Prime Minister Léon Blum and the *Front Populaire*, this paper will focus on the foreign policy of this left-leaning government. France's Popular Front coalition of socialist and communist parties came to power in 1936 under the expectation that their government would take a hard line in standing up against rightists at home and the Third Reich abroad. Instead, Blum's government pursued a policy of *rapprochement* towards France's longtime adversary. Of the many goals of the 1937 Exposition, extending an olive branch towards Germany and promoting feelings of goodwill between the two nations was priority number one.

As unexpected as it was for the Popular Front government to ameliorate relations with Hitler, Germany's apparent friendliness towards a government headed by a Jewish intellectual and socialist was even more perplexing. Shortly after the election of the Popular Front in 1936,

the French ambassador to Berlin, André François-Poncet, wrote to the Foreign Minister in Paris to note the lack of criticism towards this new government. “We suddenly saw the most francophobic journalists withdraw their claws and, respectful of the orders that they were transmitted, observe a quasi-total discretion,” Poncet explained, noting the change in tone following the election.¹³ What accounted for this order from the very top of the Nazi government was the belief that the socialist government was weak and that France was now vulnerable to any number of catastrophes, most significantly, civil war. “Precisely because they believe that a tragic period of our history is going to begin,” Poncet continued, “because they discount that a drama is inevitable, they regard it good politics to not look, foresee, or desire.”¹⁴ In other words, Germany could rest easy in the belief that its longtime rival was on the verge of self-destruction and use this weakness to its advantage.

There was some insight on the part of the Germans in that calculation. The election of a Popular Front coalition in Spain had, after all, precipitated civil war. There was every reason to believe the same might happen in France. Arguably, a civil war of sorts already engulfed France. It was not officially declared and not widespread throughout the country, but violence between political factions nonetheless occurred, especially in Paris. During the height of the Exposition in September of '37, terrorist bombings destroyed the headquarters of the Employers' Federation and Parisian metal industries, natural strongholds of socialist and syndicalist sentiment.¹⁵ So confusing and divisive were the politics of the time that the highly politicized press debated whether the terrorists had been labor agitators, foreign revolutionary elements or right-wing

¹³ André François-Poncet, Document 230 in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, 2eme Série, Tome II (1er Avril-18 Juillet 1936)* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1968), 354.

¹⁴ Document 230, 356.

¹⁵ Weber, 172.

provocateurs.¹⁶ The bombings were in fact the responsibility of the Comité secret d'action révolutionnaire, nicknamed the *Cagouleurs* (hooded ones), a right wing faction disenchanted with the passivity of other rightist groups such as the *Croix de Feu* and the *Action Française*.¹⁷ The level of fractionalization in the right wing alone gives some idea of the contentiousness of the climate and the difficulty the government had in pleasing a majority of the French.

Bad as the problems were at home, the Popular Front had these domestic troubles exacerbated by the continually escalating international crises. What explains the Popular Front's soft approach towards Germany were Blum's fears "that France would one day find herself faced with a civil war further complicated by an external war."¹⁸ Blum, known for his pacifist leanings, molded his foreign policy to be cautious, so as to not alienate segments of the population threatening violence. His goal was to keep the foreign policy of the Popular Front following in the tradition of previous governments and to reduce claims from the right that he was blinded by his left-wing ideology.¹⁹ Indeed, the *Rassemblement Populaire*, the list of publicized goals of the Popular Front, outlined foreign policy plans in which nothing appeared explicitly controversial. There were calls for further co-operation through the collective security of the League of Nations and efforts to move from an "armed peace" to an "unarmed peace."²⁰ Efforts to reduce armaments between nations was not a new phenomenon and had been pursued by successive French governments between the wars. The only guidelines that indicated this was a new policy of the left was one that called for the nationalization of war industries and another that asked for the "co-operation of the people...especially of the working masses, for the preservation and

¹⁶ Weber, 172.

¹⁷ Weber, 172.

¹⁸ Jacques Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914-1945*, Trans. Translance (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 196.

¹⁹ Néré, 196.

²⁰ Programme of Rassemblement in Néré, 340.

organization of peace.”²¹ It was with these modest goals of keeping the peace that the French policy of *rapprochement* began in earnest.

Rapprochement was not a one way street, wherein the French alone attempted to court the Germans into playing nicely. The German Economic Minister, Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, a figure instrumental in the financing of the German pavilion and the economic message it bore in 1937 had been sending signals to prominent members of France’s foreign service that he was hopeful that rapprochement would work. “He told me that he hoped deeply for the rapprochement between Germany and France which Monsieur François-Poncet worked for, he knew, was for the best,” the French ambassador to Belgium wrote to the *Quai d’Orsay* after meeting with Schacht.²² Schacht then reportedly told the ambassador that a rapprochement was “indispensable to the general peace” and that it would require a “departure from ideological struggles” as well as the need not to “stand on sentimental ground.”²³ When he traveled to Paris for the inauguration of the exposition, Schacht met with Blum and discussed the practicability of balancing Blum’s desire for Germany to be admitted to the League of Nations and Hitler’s own grievances concerning economic and colonial matters.²⁴ Blum recalled that in this meeting, Schacht arrived smiling, smirking, “*la bouche en Coeur*,” literally “heart mouth.”²⁵ With such friendly and cordial relations with a high ranking Nazi Minister, the possibility of *rapprochement*’s success seemed likely to Blum and his cabinet.

Schacht was not the lone German voice expressing hope in the pursuit of an understanding. He was joined by Joachim von Ribbentrop’s moderate predecessor in the German

²¹ Programme of Rassemblement, 340.

²² Jules Laroche, Document 279 in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, Tome V*, 441.

²³ Laroche, Document 279, 442.

²⁴ “Conversation du Dr. Schacht avec M. Léon Blum le 28 Mai 1937, Document 470, in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939 Tome V*, 810.

²⁵ Document 470, 806.

Foreign Ministry, Konstantin von Neurath. Neurath reportedly was full of optimism when discussing the future of Franco-German relations with Poncet in early 1937. “He believes that the moment of a grand general agreement approaches. As I spoke to him of the warring influences that exist in the Führer's entourage, he affirmed that I was absolutely mistaken, so long as I ‘put away’ those of Monsieur Goering,” Poncet reported with great enthusiasm to Blum’s Foreign Minister, Yvon Delbos.²⁶

The opinions of Dr. Schacht or von Neurath, of course, did not exactly equate to the policy goals of men like von Ribbentrop, Goering, or Hitler himself. Evidence goes all the way back to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* to suggest that the Führer never intended a sincere relationship with France. In his book, he vented that France was the “inexorable mortal enemy of Germany.”²⁷ While Hitler might have considered an alliance with Great Britain, he saw no such future in France apart from complete subjugation and purification of a France he believed had been “negritified” through the influence of Jewish finance.²⁸ Hitler’s sincerity in *rapprochement* is debatable. As some believe, including Ambassador Poncet in his memoirs, Germany actively played around with the basic notions of the *rapprochement* policy to lull France into a false sense of security.

The years of 1936 and 1937 were indeed placid enough to raise the hopes for lasting peace. Cultural *rapprochement* was being pursued by actors outside the traditional realms of foreign policy. Civil society took the idea of *rapprochement* to heart through the foundation of several organizations or youth clubs that promoted inter-border cooperation, such as the Deutsch-Französische Gesellschaft and its French counterpart, the Comité franco-allemand.²⁹

²⁶ André François-Poncet, Document 310 in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, Tome IV*, 533.

²⁷ Fiss, 15.

²⁸ Fiss, 15.

²⁹ Fiss, 21.

These organizations, while sympathetic to the goals of National Socialism, promoted cooperation between the two nations by hosting student exchange programs and youth ski retreats, setting up interlibrary loan systems and publishing an official journal, the *Cahiers Franco-Allemands/Deutsch-Französische Monatshefte*.³⁰ Together with the policy makers in Paris and Berlin, these organizations served as an equal force that propelled a seemingly good-natured relationship forward. As the Paris Exposition continued in the summer of '37, Hitler cordially welcomed important French figures to an exhibition of French paintings in Berlin at the Prussian Academy of Fine Arts, then to another art exhibition at the opening of the German Art Museum in Munich and finally an international exhibition of hunting.³¹ However, Poncet later reflected on this as not much more than an illusion: "The games, fêtes, visits, exchanges of cordiality, personal contacts established at expositions, demonstrations and effusions...fell very short of justifying an optimistic view of the situation."³² The policy of *rapprochement* merely gave Hitler more time to re-arm, serving as little more than a "pause between acts, while refreshments and sweetmeats were served."³³ Given the mixed signals of friendliness and aggressiveness coming from Germany, it is easy to see just how the foreign policy elite could be uncertain as to where the relationship was headed. Ambassador Poncet once noted witnessing a wager between a British Ambassador who believed Europe headed towards peace and a French ambassador who believed what was going on was nothing but a "vigil of arms," a putting off of the inevitable.³⁴ Would the Poncet of the 1930s have been so sure of his fellow ambassador's statement as he was writing his memoirs in the post-war years?

³⁰ Fiss, 23.

³¹ Poncet, 213.

³² Poncet, 223.

³³ Poncet, 223.

³⁴ Poncet, 224.

It is important to note the differences between the French relationship with the Germans and that with the other big player at the '37 Exposition: the Soviets. As with the Germans, the French could never be sure if the Russians were aiming to be their friend or sought their destruction, but for very different reasons. Contrary to moderate and right wing fears that Blum's government would be a puppet of Stalin and the Comintern, the Popular Front resisted entering into any form of military alliance with the Soviet Union. Heeding a warning from the British, Foreign Minister Delbos was advised by Ambassador Corbin to consider the adverse effects of a Franco-Soviet pact:

We will see it as a preview of the the force of the Communist Party in France. That will risk losing a good part of the sympathies that conservative circles have recently expressed. And the United States themselves, of whose opinion will carry much weight if a conflict threatens to escalate in Europe, will be profoundly influenced themselves by the conclusion of a military accord between France and the USSR which could confuse all...³⁵

In approaching the Soviet Union, the French seemed at all times skeptical of the end goals of Stalin. In the time when France's all-consuming foreign policy goal was the healing of the historic Franco-German antagonism, there was concern that any formal relationship with the USSR was actually part of Stalin's devious machinations to further destabilize the fragile continent. "Do they want to widen the gap that separates France from Germany?" Corbin asked hypothetically of the Soviets; "Do they fear that such a reconciliation operates only at their expense? In this case do they not feel they will be the first to bear the responsibility of a bankruptcy of peace?"³⁶ While France had entered into an agreement of mutual assistance with the Soviets in 1935 out of concern over Nazi aggression, equal fears about Stalin's intentions held the French back from taking the next logical step and entering into a formal military

³⁵ Charles Corbin in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, Tome V*, 477.

³⁶ Charles Corbin in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, Tome V*, 477.

alliance.³⁷ While those in the *Quai d'Orsay* distrusted both Hitler and Stalin, the great hope of mending relations with France's bordering rival encouraged a willingness to acquiesce more to the German authoritarian regime rather than to that of the Russians.

The French knew all too well that the cost of drawing closer towards the Russians was the increased paranoia on the part of Hitler that France was attempting to encircle Germany once again, as it had before the Great War.³⁸ Hitler's mercurial side came out all the more when the subject of Franco-Soviet negotiations was broached. French popular perception of the Führer became all the more confused when, on the day after the French House of Delegates ratified the Franco-Soviet pact in January 1936, the Parisian journal *Le Matin* ran an exclusive interview with Hitler. In this article, the German leader, according to Ambassador Poncet, "evinced the warmest feelings and the most conciliating disposition towards France. With remarkable insistence he expressed a desire for amity and a will for agreement and rapprochement."³⁹ The problem was that the apparent peace statements which Hitler made in *Le Matin* had actually been given a week before the ratification of the new pact with the East.⁴⁰ When he found out about this mistiming of the press, Hitler was livid with the French press. He called Ambassador Poncet to his presence and charged that the delayed publication had been part of a deliberate effort on the part of the French government or the Foreign Ministry specifically to make a fool of the Führer.⁴¹ Out of this confusing series of events came the important moment in 1936 when Hitler ordered the re-militarization of the Rhineland, as the new Franco-Soviet Pact ostensibly broke the Locarno Treaty.⁴² This moment in 1936, which many believed might precipitate war,

³⁷ Weber, 142.

³⁸ Poncet, 186

³⁹ Poncet, 191

⁴⁰ Poncet, 191

⁴¹ Poncet, 192.

⁴² Poncet, 192.

lingered in the minds of the French. Tensions were high, fears needed to be assuaged and people needed to be brought together. It was in a climate of these monumental problems that the 1937 *Exposition Internationale* opened.

The Exposition became a crucial piece in the France's attempt to prove to Hitler that they were not about to fall to the power of the Comintern. Between France and Germany, Hitler reportedly said there was only one subject of contention that got in the way: French "indulgence for communism" and the "accord with Soviet Russia."⁴³ Poncet was forced to tell the Führer that he was mistaken and that there was "no tentative communist coup d'État to fear" and that France followed "a path of peaceful and quiet evolution that the exposition of the next spring would clarify and coronate."⁴⁴ "He [Hitler] marked newfound interest that the 1937 exposition inspired in him," Poncet noted to Minister Delbos, "expressing the regret of not being able to attend and the hope that the circumstances would permit some of his collaborators to visit."⁴⁵ In this moment, the Popular Front had more reason than ever to believe that the Exposition would at long last give France the kind of understanding with Hitler they desired. If Hitler claimed he was inspired by the 1937 exposition, the Popular Front was equally inspired not to disappoint.

As the 1937 Expo has been described before as "a sort of Popular Front WPA," it is important to examine some of the main architectural and artistic pieces specifically showcased by the French government to gain further insight into its foreign policy priorities. Even if the original plans for the exposition originated in the time before the Popular Front, under the leadership of Blum, the planners ratcheted up the overt political messages to show that France

⁴³ Poncet in Document 394, Tome IV, 684.

⁴⁴ Poncet in Document 394, Tome IV, 685.

⁴⁵ Poncet in Document 394, Tome IV, 685.

was modern, progressive and a global leader.⁴⁶ Granted, in characteristic Popular Front fashion, in order to appeal to the segment of the population which opposed their policies, they muddled the forward-looking nature of the exposition with “a large regional section at the fair with provincial architecture and folklore festivals.”⁴⁷ Here, the domestic culture war between traditionalists and modernists betrayed the image that the Popular Front hoped to project of a France unified and strong. Through these contradictions in tone, France came across as divided and ill prepared to tackle the challenges of the era. Naturally, France would find it difficult to vie against the one-party dictatorships of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in presenting an image of solidarity and stability.

It is important not to underestimate the importance of stability, or an illusion of such, in the context of the 1930s. The assurance of the stability of the French franc was considered the most important economic policy in France during the depression.⁴⁸ France, although hit hardest by the Great Depression later than the United States and the rest of Europe, exacerbated its economic woes through a monetary policy that viewed deflation of the franc as anathema.⁴⁹ Rather than follow the sort of Keynesian policies which called for spending their way out of the depression, the government cut spending so as to avoid inflation and devaluation.⁵⁰ This traditional, monetarist approach to the economy did not end with Blum’s election, and in fact, it only got worse once Blum tried desperately to convince foreign investors that France was not heading towards chaos or civil war. The government’s Finance Minister, Vincent Auriol, already obtained a loan from Britain equivalent to twenty-five million American dollars, using the

⁴⁶ Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3.

⁴⁷ Fiss, 4.

⁴⁸ Adamthwaite, 143.

⁴⁹ Adamthwaite, 143.

⁵⁰ Adamthwaite, 143.

French rail system as collateral, on the condition that the Treasury would increase spending by thirty five billion francs to meet a rearmament plan once slated for nineteen billion.⁵¹ Plans to focus on public works or other social projects were put aside as the Popular Front “spent more on guns than butter” to calm the fears of lenders.⁵²

If there was one group that saw this turn away from social spending as an act of betrayal, it was the very vocal mass of unionized workers. The stability of the economy under the Popular Front often hinged on the labor unions and their contentment with government policies or lack thereof. The Popular Front’s initial pro-labor policies gave workers the reduced hours of a guaranteed forty hour workweek and increased half or full holidays, at the price of decreased production.⁵³ However, these small changes in France’s social and labor policies were not enough to satisfy the proletariat masses which made up the Popular Front’s voting base. Strikes, organized by France’s most powerful union, the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), in conjunction with the more radical *Confédération générale du travail unitaire* (CGTU) continually held France hostage with the threat of complete economic shut-down. In this climate of strained economic relations, mistrust begat more mistrust as “workers feared employers; employers feared workers; small employers feared ruin.”⁵⁴

As the grounds were being laid by the unions, many believed the Exposition was labor’s to ruin. In February of 1937, preparations for the fair were looking good. “They will be ready,” boasted the front cover of *L’Illustré du Petit Journal*, which featured an image of laborers hard at work setting a stone walkway in front of the Eiffel Tower.⁵⁵ Blum had given a speech to shore up

⁵¹ Alvin C. Eurich and Elmo C. Wilson, *In 1937* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), 363.

⁵² Adamthwaite, 145.

⁵³ Weber, 152.

⁵⁴ Weber, 151.

⁵⁵ “Ils Seront Prets” *L’Illustré du Petit Journal*, No. 2409 (21 Fevrier 1937), <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k718289n.image.langFR>>.

the efforts of the workers, declaring, “The work that you are in the process of accomplishing will benefit the entirety of France and it is the entirety of France that can take a legitimate pride in your work.”⁵⁶

This was hardly an exaggeration on the part of Blum to rally his political base of the labor force. The prestige and reputation of France banked on the efforts of those that constructed the grounds. Although this played well to the image of the Popular Front being a party of the people, Blum quickly learned the downside to this arrangement when the planners faced a strike that would help paint the eventual narrative of the exposition as an embarrassment for France. In the months leading up to the Exposition’s slated opening on May Day, 1937, the French laboring classes were frenzied into a major strike by the provocative actions of the right-wing *Parti Social Français* (PSF). Deliberately meeting in a cinema in the left-wing hotbed of Paris’ *Clichy* neighborhood, the PSF successfully turned the police against the raucous left-wing mob that had gathered to protest the meeting.⁵⁷ The police shot and killed six, wounding many more, before Prime Minister Blum arrived from the Opera dressed in his finery.⁵⁸ This poor reaction on the part of the police and Blum turned the labor factions against the government, just as the PSF had wanted, leading to a general strike two days later.⁵⁹ Blum, already dedicated to economic revamping in military spending was simultaneously at the mercy of unions threatening to prolong the strike if he did not allot \$265,800,000 for more public works projects.⁶⁰

What this meant for the rapidly approaching opening date of the Exposition was that the inauguration would either have to be postponed or France would face the prospect that visitors would see the pitiful sight of scaffolding and wet cement. Neither scenario reflected well on

⁵⁶ “Ils Seront Prets.”

⁵⁷ Weber, 169.

⁵⁸ Weber, 169-170.

⁵⁹ Weber, 170.

⁶⁰ Eurich and Wilson, 366.

Blum's government or the French nation as a whole. Although Paris hosted the Colonial Exposition of 1931, this was to be the first world's fair held in France since the triumphant 1900 fair. The *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 gave Paris the *Petit* and *Grand Palais*, the *Chateau d'Eau*, its first taste of *cinéma* and the Metro system which still operates daily under the city. That exposition was ostensibly the crowning moment for *Belle Epoque* France, the height of the mythic *Fin-de-siecle* "Golden Age." Whether the *Belle Epoque* truly was as great as popular imagination held, nostalgia for a time when France sat on the throne of European culture and statecraft heightened the sense of importance of the '37 exposition.

The pressure to live up to expectations was tremendous, as failure to do so would give the impression of a nation whose glory peaked at the turn of the century. "Now French pride was definitely wounded," was the verdict of two American authors, when the delayed openings led to the pavilions of the totalitarian nations of Italy, Germany and Russia being the only ones to open on time.⁶¹ Granted, this was notably because Germany and Italy broke the rules and imported their own laborers and the communists who were members of the French unions made sure that no strike would stop the construction of the Soviet pavilion.⁶² To make matters more humiliating for the French government, the great hope of boosting revenues via admissions prices was defeated by the fact that most entrances were without gates, allowing thousands of visitors in without paying the required admission fee.⁶³ The editors of *L'Illustré du Petit Journal* attempted to deflect the negative effect of the delay and the nostalgia for the 1900 expo by comparing it head on: "We will see as the years pass, these expositions have the same legend. Even in 1900 people said, 'We will not be ready! We are not ready!' And then we were ready all the same...or

⁶¹ Eurich and Wilson, 367.

⁶² Olivier Bernier, *Fireworks at Dusk* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 259.

⁶³ Eurich and Wilson, 367.

close enough. And the Exposition of 1900 was a triumph! So it will be, so it will be for our Exposition of 1937!”⁶⁴

Yet, make no mistake, the 1937 Exposition was not about re-living the past, but showing off the aesthetic of the future: an aesthetic of power. The pressures on Blum’s government to beef up France’s appearance as a strong and legitimate competitor with the totalitarian regimes did not merely take the form of conservative economic policies. Many French citizens were in the mood for the same sort of spectacle they saw coming from across their borders in Germany. French audiences had seen Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph des Willens* and became enthralled with the hypnotic qualities of the Nuremberg rallies and the possibility that one day they might witness similar pageantry that glorified *la République*.⁶⁵ The appeal of fascism in France, as it had been in other parts of the continent, often arose from its aesthetics. The sheer scale and strength of the crowds rallying in unison held a disturbingly beautiful quality for the French who worried that their nation was on the downturn.⁶⁶ In the year before the 1937 Exposition, Hitler was given a vehicle with which he could captivate a global audience: the Olympic Games. As Ambassador Poncet noted about the games:

Crowned heads, princes, and illustrious guests thronged to Berlin, eager to meet this prophetic being who apparently held the fate of Europe in his hand and to observe the Germany which he had transformed and galvanized in his irresistible grip. Beholding a flawless organization, an impeccable order, a perfect discipline, and a limitless prodigality, everyone went into ecstasy.⁶⁷

When it came time for the French to host a world event on the scale of the Olympic Games in 1937, there was a strong desire to put on a show that could rival that of the Nazi rallies. When the *quatorze juillet* national holiday fell in the middle of the 1937 Exposition, event organizers

⁶⁴ “Il y a 37 ans!” *L’Illustré Petit Journal*, No. 2426 (20 Juin, 1937), <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k718305p/f1.image.langFR>>.

⁶⁵ Fiss, 181.

⁶⁶ Fiss, 181.

⁶⁷ Poncet, 203-204.

took the opportunity to stage a nighttime rally with eerie parallels to those seen in Germany.⁶⁸ Gigantic tricolor flags topped by *Marianne's* Phrygian cap and other symbols of France's revolutionary heritage lined the *Champs Élysées* and other major Parisian thoroughfares.⁶⁹ At night, the *Place de la Concorde* was illuminated with the glow of floodlights in a manner reminiscent of the rallying grounds at Nuremburg or the Nazi additions to the entrance at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.⁷⁰ Yet, given the compacted space of Paris' various plazas, the Bastille Day celebrations could not compare in size or scale to the long, orderly rows of troops able to assemble in the Nuremberg grounds and thus they have largely been forgotten from historical memory.⁷¹ Rallies in Germany were used to show strength and threaten war; the desire for such rallies in France was intended to counter the belligerent Germans, to show them that France could stand their ground so as discourage war.

If Blum's primary foreign policy goal was the preservation of peace in Europe at all costs, it is fitting that one of the chief planners of the exposition, Edmond Labbé specifically said, "The International Exhibition of Paris will be a festival of peace."⁷² Crowning the head of the Trocadero esplanade was a newly constructed *Monument de la Paix*. Striking a similar look to Napoleon's column in the *Place Vendôme*, this monument re-appropriated the traditional use of columns as symbols of military victory into one of international cooperation⁷³. Even material published by the *Société pour le Développement du Tourisme* compared the monument to Trajan's column, turning one of the great symbols of military prowess in antiquity on its head.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Fiss, 183.

⁶⁹ Fiss, 184.

⁷⁰ Fiss, 185

⁷¹ Fiss, 186.

⁷² Vincent Cronin, *Paris: City of Light 1919-1939* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 276.

⁷³ Société pour le Développement du Tourisme, "Monument de la Paix" *World Fairs : Exposition Internationale des arts et techniques dans la vie moderne de Paris* <http://www.worldfairs.info/expopavillondetails.php?expo_id=12&pavillon_id=827>.

⁷⁴ Société pour le Développement du Tourisme.

Encircled by the flags of the participating nation and a large map of the globe, the fifty meter tall column was emblazoned with the names of the “apostles of peace” from history, with the noted intention that it would be a “veritable sanctuary” where the “horrors of war and the efforts of all societies of the world struggling for peace would be evoked.”⁷⁵ At the foot of the column, the Latin word PAX and at the top, a metal starburst, added to the less than subtle message of this memorial.⁷⁶

Such advocacy for peace on the part of Blum’s France in the face of a rapidly militarizing Germany perhaps appears misguided in hindsight. It is easy to argue the demerits of Blum’s adherence to pacifism given the war that did eventually come. But in 1937 war did not seem inevitable; even less inevitable was the prospect that France would be so soundly defeated. Blum truly held that the dedication to and advocacy of peace was the defining ideological struggle of his day and not the leftist-rightist debate. In an article he wrote in the summer of 1937, the Prime Minister mused on the difficulties of co-existence between democracies and dictatorships. Noting that “the Duce and even the Führer have for a long time maintained more friendly relations with Soviet Russia than have Britain or France,” Blum vocalized why he was pro-peace:

The sole criterion which allows nations to be classified and distinguished from one another is their position with respect to peace, their more or less frank, more or less active, more or less constant desire to preserve it by regulating the present, and to consolidate it by arranging the future.⁷⁷

The placement of a “Monument to Peace” therefore became a conscious move on the part of the organizers of the exposition to reinforce this belief. The monument was a declarative statement

⁷⁵ Société pour le Développement du Tourisme.

⁷⁶ Postcard, Monument de la Paix, in James D. Herbert, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 32.

⁷⁷ Léon Blum, “The Problem of Peaceful Co-existence” in Néré, 341.

that the France of the Popular Front neither towed the line of Moscow nor Berlin, for it was dedicated to peace.

Although a man of the left, Blum opposed extremes on his side of the spectrum as much as the right and truly believed that the French could avoid both. “The fascist reaction that threatens to be, as the example of Germany has shown it, the refuge of the hopeless; for the moment, it is on hold...Marxist communism seems to correspond poorly to the French temperament,” Blum wrote the day of the exposition’s opening on May twenty-fifth.⁷⁸ All of his optimism about the political situation expressed at the time showed the Prime Minister’s genuine belief that liberal democracy would remain France’s salvation. Blum conceded that the “flame” of fascism was not yet fully extinct, but it was not enough to dampen his hopes about the liberating power of democracy.⁷⁹

Nice as the *Monument de la Paix* was (and was is the correct word as it was torn down during the war), it but one of the new sites tourists flocked to. The throwback to the ancient symbols seen in the Monument to Peace was counteracted by several hyper-conscious attempts to allude to the future rather than the past. In preparation for the festivities, Paris received numerous architectural facelifts meant to send a message of modernity. Parisians bid adieu to the beautiful, yet dilapidated, “pseudo-Moorish” Trocadero Palace from the 1889 Fair, to make way for the sleek, modern Trocadero museums (renamed the *Palais de Chaillot*).⁸⁰ This new structure, still standing in Paris, consisted of two low wings curving away from the *esplanade*.⁸¹ Below this central terrace stands a large staircase leading down to monumental fountains and statues of

⁷⁸ Léon Blum, *L'Expérience* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1937), 181-182.

⁷⁹ *L'Expérience*, 181.

⁸⁰ Cronin, 276.

⁸¹ Cronin, 276.

beasts of burden and nude men and women.⁸² The design was simple and sleek, untarnished by ostentatious ornamentation.

Paul Valéry, a French poet, philosopher and friend to Blum, provided quotes to be inscribed on each of the two wings.⁸³ The first quote “invites the visitor to treat the Exhibition as a treasure-house, not a tomb” and reflected a belief that “art in an increasingly rationalized and modern world should migrate from arid museums and from the attic studios of bohemians onto the streets so as to play a direct, visible and progressive social role.”⁸⁴ The other inscription more famously and poetically declares, “Every man creates as he breathes, without knowing it, but the artist is aware that he creates. He puts his whole being into what he does; the pleasurable pain it affords him gives him strength.”⁸⁵ These inscriptions, which stress the primacy of art in daily life, contain a political dimension not to be overlooked. At this time, Valéry served the Popular Front government as a kind of cultural ambassador to Central and Eastern European nations. There the philosopher assured skeptical audiences that in spite of political divisions in the country, France would remain “the temple of art and culture.”⁸⁶ With the promotion of French art and culture came the promotion of a way of life. From country to country, Valéry, acting as another famous French *apôtre de la paix*, was, in essence, saying that great art and culture came from democratic and peaceful societies. It was a pitch for political liberty through artistic liberty.

The *Palais de Chaillot* was not the only new landmark to dot Paris that attempted to whitewash over the past and present a vision of a new society. Anything seemed possible as a way to revamp Paris to be a city of the future. One scheme cooked up by a fervent Communist

⁸² Cronin, 276.

⁸³ Cronin, 277.

⁸⁴ Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 237.

⁸⁵ Valéry in Cronin, 277.

⁸⁶ Valéry in Cronin, 277.

proposed hiring three thousand unemployed laborers to repaint the façades of Parisian houses, so that each street had its own distinct color, whether green, yellow or blue.⁸⁷ While this certainly would have been a step in altering the classical beauty of Paris, it did not seek to alter the architectural past as much as his other grandiose idea: to paint the exterior of the gothic cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in the French tricolor.⁸⁸ Needless to say, such a radical redesign of the City of Lights never occurred; however, it was a moment in history when the pursuit of creating a society for the future allowed all options to be put on the table.

In the interwar years, the movement to modernize architecture (and in so doing, preempt the future) became the passion of the celebrated Franco-Swiss architect LeCorbusier.⁸⁹ Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, LeCorbusier proposed to remake Paris anew, hoping to outdo even Baron Hausmann in the total transformation of the ancient city. Paris was to become a city of towering skyscrapers designed to dwarf the Eiffel Tower.⁹⁰ These proposed designs never came to fruition, largely due to popular resistance that sought to return France to *Belle Epoque* values and ways of life and viewed excessive modernization as a byproduct of unwanted Americanization.⁹¹ The city of Paris aside, the interwar years were arguably characterized by the concept of the “future,” as explored by scholar Roxanne Panchasi. International Communism as well as National Socialism and Fascism all offered their very unique vision of the future through arts, architecture, films and propaganda. France in the twenties and thirties was not exempt from looking towards movements which anticipated “the city of the future,” “the next war” or the coming of an international community through the language of Esperanto.⁹² So in spite of the

⁸⁷ Cronin, 277.

⁸⁸ Cronin, 277.

⁸⁹ Roxanne Panchasi, *Future Tense: The Culture of Anticipation in France Between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 63.

⁹⁰ Panchasi, 64.

⁹¹ Panchasi, 74.

⁹² Panchasi, 7.

reservations towards entirely reconstructing Paris, the Popular Front allowed LeCorbusier to work his modernist magic at the exposition in the pavilion that was meant to be the great showcase for France's vision of the future: the *Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux*.⁹³ Unlike in other French pavilions, the artwork of the *Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux* turned away from the *paysanne* aesthetic of glorifying rustic, rural France and emphasized the beauty of industrial life.⁹⁴ Instead of being painted, murals followed the modernist style of photomontage juxtaposing the forms of circuits, pipes, pistons and valves with sharp and brightly colored lines.⁹⁵ Another photomontage emphasized recreation with oversized cut-out photographs of smiling children and youths at play, holding hands.⁹⁶ The intention of the *Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux* was to counteract the reactionary, nostalgic sentiments in the French population and show that a progressive, mechanized society could be pleasurable, as well.

In spite of these new architectural additions to Paris, the French found themselves overshadowed by the monumental edifices of two totalitarian regimes (Italy's pavilion, although completed early as well, was a squat, unobtrusive looking building in which the Italians focused more on promoting tourism than on the Duce's blustery persona).⁹⁷ The two pavilions of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany seemed like distorted mirror images of one another. Architecturally speaking, both pavilions consisted of long hallways running parallel to the Seine with a single tower serving as the entryway on the side of the hall closest to the *Pont d'Iéna*. Much ado can be made about the architectural similarity of these two buildings reflecting an unsettling similarity between international communism and National Socialism. While the position of these pavilions being parallel to the Seine encouraged an elongated hallway design, it

⁹³ Fiss, 93.

⁹⁴ Fiss, 93.

⁹⁵ Fiss, 93.

⁹⁶ Fiss, 93.

⁹⁷ Bernier, 260.

would be fallacious to suppose that the similarity in style represented a similarity in ideology between Nazism and Stalinism. While architectural parallelism was not a reflection of close ideological beliefs, it was not by chance that this occurred either. Rather, this double image was a cunning bit of propaganda on the part of Nazi architect, Albert Speer. Economics Minister Schacht had come to Speer after Hitler rejected all the preliminary plans for the *Deutsches Haus* and threatened to pull Germany out from the exposition.⁹⁸ When Speer traveled to Paris to survey the exposition grounds, he “by chance stumbled into a room containing the secret sketch of the Soviet pavilion.”⁹⁹ Noting the threatening figures of the *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* pointing towards the direction of the German pavilion, Speer would later admit, “I therefore designed a cubic mass, also elevated on stout pillars, which seemed to be checking this onslaught, while from the cornice of my tower an eagle with the swastika in its claws looked down on the Russian sculptures.”¹⁰⁰

This claim from Speer’s memoirs appears dubious when it is considered that a blueprint of the Soviet pavilion annotated in French was discovered among his personal papers now housed in Munich.¹⁰¹ Speculation as to who gave Speer the secret plans ranges from the four French architects assigned to work with the Germans in the development of the *Deutsches Haus* to Jacques Gréber, the head architect of the 1937 exposition. Author Karen Fiss postulates that in giving Speer the Soviet designs, Gréber hoped to make a grand architectural and political statement in 1937.¹⁰² Not only would these two symmetrical edifices create a gateway to the fairgrounds in the same way that the two wings of the *Palais de Chaillot* did on the other side of

⁹⁸ Albert Speer, “Inside the Third Reich,” Trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 81.

⁹⁹ Speer, 81.

¹⁰⁰ Speer, 81.

¹⁰¹ Fiss, 60.

¹⁰² Fiss, 61.

the esplanade, the symbolic balancing of Communism and Nazism would add a level of symbolic “diplomatic equilibrium.”¹⁰³ Whether this truly was a stroke of good luck for Speer or there had been some foul play involved, the Nazis ran with the information and used it to their advantage.

By tweaking the Soviet design ever so subtly, Speer took the best symbolic qualities of the Soviet pavilion, dynamism and power, and strengthened them in his representation of Germany. The Soviet architect Boris Iofan had designed his long hallway to appear as if it were gradually rising up in waves, thrusting the two marching figures atop the tower forwards.¹⁰⁴ In so doing, Iofan created a fundamentally modernist design meant to impart a vision of the Soviet Union both as progressive and as being the manifestation of the throngs of popular sentiment. Its aesthetic was sleek and alluded to the style of futuristic skyscrapers.¹⁰⁵ Speer took this same fundamental design and reworked the modernity and progressivism out of it, turning it into the new style of monumental classicism found in much of fascist architecture. If Iofan had turned to the skyline of New York as his inspiration, Speer turned to the Rome of the Caesars. In comparison to the forward moving and rising blocks that made up the tower of the Soviet pavilion, the German tower rose above Paris comprised of “ten attached piers” that gave the pavilion the strength and dignity of timeless Greco-Roman classicism.¹⁰⁶ In fact, seen from afar the ten-columns together made the tower look like one large column, a perfect metaphor analogous to that of the fasces binding many small components into a much greater whole.

In his memoirs, Speer noted his surprise that the French turned to this hybrid of neo-classicism themselves in the newly constructed *Palais de Chaillot*, *Palais des Musées d’Art*

¹⁰³ Fiss, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Fiss, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Fiss, 60.

¹⁰⁶ Fiss, 57.

Moderne and the *Musée des Travaux Publics*.¹⁰⁷ The Nazi architect mused, “It has often been asserted that this style is characteristic of the architecture of totalitarian states. That is not at all true. Rather, it was characteristic of the era and left its impress upon Washington, London, and Paris as well as Rome, Moscow and our plans for Berlin.”¹⁰⁸ A world threatened by both economic and political tensions, as it was in the 1930s, bred the need for architecture that could reassure the people of a nation’s greatness. In an era of competing shows of stability and longevity, everything Speer made the *Deutsches Haus* was meant to radiate an impression of Germany as Europe’s powerful defender against radical aggression from the Soviets. The role of architecture in the Third Reich’s vision of the world cannot be overstated given Hitler’s artistic love of architecture. When Ambassador William Bullitt heard Hitler boast that his buildings would “make more magnificent ruins than the Greeks,” he told Franklin Roosevelt that “that seemed to me to be about as revealing psychologically as anything I have ever heard.”¹⁰⁹ The pavilion, like other examples of Fascist architecture, was constructed to transcend time and send the regime’s message of power and authority through all ages.

The crowning means by which Speer assured his global audience that the German bulwark was mightier than Bolshevism was through obstinate negotiation with Gréber and the rest of the exposition’s organizers. Although the Germans had originally been allotted an area of 3,200 square meters, Gréber became concerned with the German pavilion dwarfing those of other nations, particularly due to the colossal tower.¹¹⁰ Gréber asked for a twenty percent reduction of all dimensions: length and width of the hall and height of the tower. Speer, knowing how precarious Germany’s participation in the exposition was and knowing as well how much

¹⁰⁷ Speer, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Speer, 81.

¹⁰⁹ William Christian Bullitt, 4 November, 1937, *For the President Personal and Secret: Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, Edit. Orville H. Bullitt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 230.

¹¹⁰ Fiss, 58.

the French government wanted the Nazi presence there, refused to shorten his tower by more than ten percent. Speer got what he wanted and then some. The final dimensions of the pavilion might have reduced his tower but in compensation, the Germans were given an extra 364 square feet and the tower of the *Deutsches Haus* still edged out that of Iofan's structure.¹¹¹

As important as the exteriors of these buildings were, the real political messages of the respective regimes could be found inside. The official guidebook to the German pavilion, *Deutschland in Paris/Allemagne à Paris* remains the best primary source material in understanding what the interior of the *Deutsches Haus* looked like. Not only is it filled with pictures of all the German art and products at the pavilion, it offers a unique view into how the Nazis wished for their nation to be presented to the French and the wider world. Given that this was an official, state-approved publication of Germany, it can be said that the book reflects the point of view of the Nazi Regime. The book is scant on text but makes use of black and white photography from one of Hitler's favored photographers, Heinrich Hoffman. As this book was, in essence, the German pavilion in print, it sought to serve the same sort of function: to glorify Germany as a nation of peaceful arts and industry. Even seventy plus years on, it's easily recognizable as propaganda, however it offers insight into how the Nazis successfully exported their point of view to foreign audiences.

The book (and thus we can assume to some extent, the pavilion, as well) overlooked the international political tensions and wariness of the decade to make a case to the world for Germany's dedication to peaceful and scientific pursuits. The polarizing politics of National Socialism were almost entirely sidestepped; the pavilion was not to be about ideology. There was no mention of the racial hygiene beliefs, no evidence of anti-Semitism and no indication that Germany sought greater territorial expansion at the expense of their neighbors. The only

¹¹¹ Fiss, 58.

references to Hitler include a portrait before the title page, a picture of the Fuehrer overlooking a model of the pavilion with Albert Speer, and a short, innocuous quote: “The monuments of civilisation of mankind have always been the alters that remind it of its better mission and higher dignity.”¹¹² If Hitler was trying to lull the French into a false sense of security to ensure a policy of appeasement, as author Karen Fiss has argued, largely divorcing Hitler from the pavilion perhaps made Germany more palatable to an international audience. Art work in the pavilion did not glorify the Fuehrer, or the army, or even the masses of loyal party supporters. Instead, simple paintings of German communities at work and leisure with titles such as “Comradeship” were the preferred choice.¹¹³ The message was that National Socialism had bridged the contentious gap between labor and management that ripped apart nations like Spain and France. The paintings made the case that in Germany, planners and workers worked and celebrated closely and organically thanks to the mediating effect of the Nazi government.

Considering, as well, that the exposition took place during the continuing economic slump of the 1930s, nations used their pavilions to make their countries appear as attractive investment opportunities. Germany was no exception. By focusing on tangible objects like German industry’s flashy Mercedes sports car, optical equipment, porcelain ware and radio and film industries, the Germans could impress foreign investors with their quality of manufacturing.¹¹⁴ Nowhere to be found in the exhibition was a pitch to use investment money for rearmament. Money would flow in from abroad via another means, however: tourism. The pavilion was supposed to encourage people to visit Germany and we get a clear indication of this at the end of *Deutschland in Paris*. Hoffman dedicated the last few pages to striking photographs

¹¹² Hitler in Heinrich Hoffman, *Deutschland in Paris: Ein Bild Buch* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1937), 6.

¹¹³ Hoffman, 36.

¹¹⁴ Hoffman, 50.

of charming German villages, pastoral landscapes and modern wonders like the *Autobahn*.¹¹⁵ Devoid of the threatening issues of “hard power,” Hoffman’s *Deutschland in Paris* and Speer’s pavilion, sought to use the “soft power” of art and industry to impress foreign nations.

It is important to note the way in which even vocal members of the Fascist and Nazi parties made statements which encouraged the public to believe in the peaceful intentions of the exposition. General Piccio, a Commisaire General of Italy made a statement opining “This peace that all the workers of the world desire so ardently, from this point can only become a living reality through this harmony of interests and only through this loyal handshake of works of which the Exposition gave us such a comforting lesson.”¹¹⁶ The German Economic Minister, Hjalmar Schacht came off as one of the most supportive of the peace and prosperity goals of the exposition by writing an introduction to *Deutschland in Paris* in which he warmly encouraged the French to come visit Germany after they witnessed the marvels at the pavilion.¹¹⁷ This lack of vitriol coming from the fascist nations regarding the Exposition complicates an Interwar narrative that often sees bellicose Nazi threats gradually increasing as the decade passed.

None of the political theatrics of the event was lost on the Americans, who were still precariously attempting to sidestep the contentious political climate on the continent. In a cable directly to Franklin Roosevelt after the opening of the expo, the American Ambassador to France, William Christian Bullitt, sent the president a picture of the symbolism, but he had a different take on it:

I enclose herewith a photograph taken from my bedroom window. It is as good a description of Europe as any dispatch could be. You will note on the left, the eagle of the Nazis, on the right the cross of the Pope, and in the middle, the Bolshevik’s hammer and

¹¹⁵ Hoffman, 120.

¹¹⁶ “L’Exposition est Fermée,” 2.

¹¹⁷ Schacht in Hoffman, 3.

sickle. The latter statue, incidentally, has a name in Paris. It is called, “Hurrying to the Lyublianka.”¹¹⁸

This document reveals two important elements about the European political scene. First, Bullitt notes the importance of the Pope’s cross as one of the three symbols in the skyline. Without a copy of Bullitt’s picture itself, it is uncertain exactly what the Ambassador was looking at to make that distinction, but in all likelihood it was the cross on the top of the church. The other insight this dispatch offers is the fact that the French were not overwhelmingly supportive of the Soviet presence in their city. Quite the opposite. By referring to the statue as “Hurrying to the Lyublianka” the French joked about a well-known Soviet prison. “If you do not remember what the Lyublianka is, ask your friend -----,” Bullitt wrote as an aside to FDR, “Her love, Steiger, is now interred there.”¹¹⁹ Bullitt continued in his casual, personal style to note that Roosevelt would remember this gentleman because he “used to knock her on the floor and jump on her stomach. For a New England girl, that was exciting.”¹²⁰ This bizarre inside joke aside, the French mocking of the “Hurrying to the Lyublianka” statue reveals that the French were in no rush to give up their liberal democracy in favor of Marxist communism, as Blum noted. On the other hand, was the lack of mocking the Nazi pavilion indicative of respect or admiration for the Third Reich?

There was good reason for the French to be reminded of the authoritarian cruelty of Stalin’s regime in the interior of the Soviet Pavilion. Pierre Lazareff, a French visitor to the Soviet Pavilion would later recall witnessing some disconcerting events occurring within the building:

The fresco which adorns the great hall represents the regime’s leading men...but between the time when the fresco was commissioned and the time when the Paris public was able to see it, most of these great men had been arrested on Stalin’s orders, charged with treason,...convicted and, in most case, execute...When my photographer arrived, a

¹¹⁸ Bullitt, 28 May, 1937, 215.

¹¹⁹ Bullitt, 215.

¹²⁰ Bullitt, 215.

painter, perched on a ladder, was trying to disguise the victims of the purges by adding, for instance, a beard to Marshal Tukhachevsky's face, sideburns to Radek, hair to Zinoviev, etc...Just as the photographer was about to take a shot of this, two 'comrade guards' threw themselves brutally on him.¹²¹

Although the purge of the army and the execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky have been cited as a major breaking point in Franco-Soviet relations, this revision of recent Russian history was not the only thing that might have turned off visitors to the Soviet pavilion.¹²² In the pursuit of capturing the awe and envy of the world community, the Soviets truly outdid themselves in making their pavilion unquestionably the most luxuriously decorated.¹²³ Such an ostentatious display of splendor had to be a public image nightmare for the land that prided itself on its anti-bourgeois, anti-materialistic ideology. The walls were covered in the rarest marble to impress and astonish but they did nothing but repulse true believers as exemplified by an elderly French woman of the working class who saw such conspicuous materialism and spat "hypocrites".¹²⁴ The crown jewel of the lavish Soviet pavilion, the most expensive item displayed at the 1937 exposition, was a "fabulous, outsize wall map of new industrial Russia made entirely of gold and precious and semi-precious stone."¹²⁵ Provincial capitals marked by star-shaped rubies, gasoline pipelines denoted in topazes, the names of important cities in letters of pure gold.¹²⁶

Bullitt's dispatches to Roosevelt offer a fascinating foreign perspective of the machinery of French domestic and foreign policy decision making on the eve of war. Although Bullitt revered the French and their culture, throughout his tenure as Ambassador he seemed to be both baffled and alarmed by France's seemingly somnambulant attitude towards the geopolitical

¹²¹ Pierre Lazareff in Bernier, 260.

¹²² Duroselle, Jean-Baptiste, *France and the Nazi Threat: The Collapse of French Diplomacy: 1932-1939*, Trans. Catherine E. Dop and Robert L. Miller (New York: Enigma Books, 2004), 262.

¹²³ Bernier, 260.

¹²⁴ Bernier, 260.

¹²⁵ Bernier, 260.

¹²⁶ Bernier, 260.

situation. The French, it seemed to him, were looking for any and all excuses to stall while making the big decisions of the day. “I wish you were in Paris today,” Bullitt told Roosevelt:

All the trees and flowers are out and it is as lovely as any place this side of paradise. Everybody has spring fever, including the entire Government...Blum and almost all his Cabinet are in the country picking primroses and those who are in town might just as well be on vacation because they are thinking about nothing except what a beautiful day it is.¹²⁷

Bullitt follows up this pleasant springtime imagery with talk of the war in Spain and the international volunteers who were being “shot to pieces.”¹²⁸ Bullitt was no warmonger and in multiple messages to Roosevelt, he made it clear that the United States’ only policy ought to be “to stay as far out of the mess as possible” and let the Europeans fix it themselves or suffer the consequences without looking to America to save them again.¹²⁹ It seems likely that the ambassador disagreed with the relaxed attitude of the French in light of the ongoing hostilities.

Yet, the ongoing hostilities did not go unnoticed at the Exposition. Visitors from around the globe could get a taste of the brutality thanks to the Loyalist Spanish pavilion and the showcasing of Pablo Picasso’s masterwork: *Guernica*. Picasso’s *Guernica* remains so celebrated that it does not need much of a description. The mural depicts the death and devastation upon civilians in the Spanish town of Guernica at the hands of German bombers, all depicted in Picasso’s unique style.

To be fair, of course, the machinery of the Quai d’Orsay was not completely ignoring the pleas of the Spanish loyalists who called on the Western democracies to aid them in their struggle against General Franco. They were not ignoring so much as making calculated political moves given the complexity of the fight. Ambassador to Madrid Herbert H. Lehman made an impassioned plea to the French Foreign Minister urging France to stay out of the conflict:

¹²⁷ Bullitt, 12 April, 1937, 209.

¹²⁸ Bullitt, 209.

¹²⁹ Bullitt, 10 January, 1937, 206.

We cannot therefore deny that Europe is now exposed to very serious complications of which the cause or occasion lies in the Spanish Civil War...But we can avoid, once more today, that the Spanish Civil War gives birth or pretext to a European conflict. It suffices to see the events in Spain as they are, with their mix of tragedy and puerility, of irreconcilable sentiments and of inseparable interests, of big words devoid of reality...if we abstain from pronouncing big words ourselves.¹³⁰

In other words, the ambassador directly advised the French Foreign Ministry to see Spain for the tragedy that it was, but to avoid making it a larger tragedy by intervening. Ambivalence about joining the conflict in Spain went hand in hand with skepticism towards Stalin's intentions. Georges Bonnet, an influential foreign policy figure of the time recalled that the Soviets egged on the French to intervene, fully intending to create a destabilizing European war "but with the Soviet Union on the sidelines."¹³¹ Loyal supporters of the Comintern's goals in Paris would shout interventionist slogans at Blum when in attendance at the *Velodrome d'Hiver* (a Parisian sports arena which would become infamous during the occupation as it became the temporary holding place for thousands of French Jews before deportation).¹³² They shouted "Planes, guns for Spain" and "Blum, get moving" through 1936 and '37, with a sense of betrayal from the leftist leader.¹³³ Yet what was Blum to do when advisors who had visited the Soviet Union warned him that the Soviets were plotting to play France and Germany off one another, in Spain or elsewhere?¹³⁴ Not only did the Soviets bet on "the storm" breaking "over France's head," there was ever the hope that once the continent fell to war once more, communists would seize control of Western European governments.¹³⁵

In spite of the apparent inaction on the Spanish issues, the Exposition ran throughout the summer to the delight of some and to the disgust of others. In a politically polarized era, even a

¹³⁰ Jean Herbet, Document 167 in *Documents Diplomatiques Français 1932-1939, Tome V*, 264.

¹³¹ Georges Bonnet, *Quai d'Orsay*, Trans. Times Press and Anthony Gibbs and Phillips, (Isle of Man: Times Press and Anthony Gibbs and Phillips, 1965), 148.

¹³² Bonnet, 149.

¹³³ Bonnet, 149.

¹³⁴ Bonnet, 146.

¹³⁵ Bonnet, 146.

fair could elucidate even the most negative reception. Reactions to the opening of the exposition varied, depending on political identification. The right-wing journal, *L'Action Française*, had, during the strikes that delayed the exposition an extra three weeks, mocked both the government for its failure in its “grand battle against fascism” and how this defeatist mentality discouraged the workers from making an effort.¹³⁶ “Recreation is recreation!” the article sneered at what these strikes seemed to them.¹³⁷ When the Exposition opened, the journal derided Blum’s declaration of the exposition being a “complicated masterwork and beautiful like a poem” as “assuredly grotesque.”¹³⁸ Injecting a dose of anti-Semitic editorializing, the author continued, “comparing the exposition to the *Illiad* or the *Aeneid* only germinates the Jewish brain.”¹³⁹ In using such “lyricism” in the crafting of the speech, the right wing press believed it was a tool to create a motto by which the Popular Front could brush over the “incontestable failure...of the Popular Front in this battle against Fascism which was staked on the opening of the Exposition on the first of May.”¹⁴⁰

The reaction to the opening of the Exposition and all that it represented was noticeably different coming from the left-wing press. On the front page of *L'Humanité*, a socialist newspaper, the opening lines to their exposition inauguration article began with a proclamation of, “Yesterday, day of the miracle. Miracle of work.”¹⁴¹ Coming from the left wing press, it is no surprise that the article glorifies the Exposition as a miracle delivered by the working class and heaps praise upon the inherent pro-peace and pro-labor goals symbolized. The author of the

¹³⁶ “Naturellement, les chantiers de l’Exposition chôment,” *L’Action Française*, Trentième année, No. 121 (1 Mai, 1937) <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7666851>>, 1.

¹³⁷ “Naturellement,” 1.

¹³⁸ G. Larpent, “L’ouverture de L’Exposition,” *L’Action Française*, Trentième année, No. 146 (26 Mai, 1937) <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k7667101>>, 2.

¹³⁹ Larpent, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Larpent, 2.

¹⁴¹ P. Vaillant-Couturier, “Art, Technique, Paix: Elle est ouverte!” *L’Humanité*, Trentquatrième année, No. 14.038 (25 Mai, 1937) <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k407089w.langFR>>, 1.

article jibed at the fascist nay-sayers who belittled the achievements of the Exposition and their inability to halt the inauguration further, stating, “They perhaps condemn today and attempt to mock. Who cares! Even incomplete, the Exposition is open. The point is made.”¹⁴² The point was indeed made, and for the left, the point looked like a great triumph. In closing, *L’Humanité* called the exposition a:

lesson of interior union and union between nations, glorification of the arts, of technique and of peace...The Exposition of 1937 seems to me admirably symbolized by this peaceful coupling that rushes towards the future, with all its youthfulness and all its joy, this monumental coupling that overcomes the pavilion of the Soviet Union and sends to the world a call for the Spirit of Labor.¹⁴³

Here was an optimistic declaration that in opening 1937 Exposition, the Popular Front government outdid even the Soviet Union in showing its commitment to peace and equitable labor relations.¹⁴⁴

Over seven decades after the exposition, there remain small reminders that this generally forgotten event took place. The *Palais de Chaillot* still draws tourists as a landmark of Paris offering one of the best views of the Eiffel Tower. Picasso’s *Guernica* still astonishes and while everything from the German pavilion was obliterated due to the war, the Soviets preserved the legacy of the exposition for much longer. Not only does Vera Mukhina’s statue of the Worker and Kolkhoz woman still stand in Moscow, the iconic figures have long served as the logo for Russia’s largest film studio, Мосфильм (Mosfilm).

To a lesser extent, a legacy continues in the form of a scholarly debate, which this paper seeks to reignite over the merit of the 1937 Expo. The conclusion of this paper and authors such as Herbert or Fiss was that the Exposition planners made an attempt to create a memorable spectacle but fell short of expectations given complicating factors. While it certainly brought in

¹⁴² Vaillant-Couturier, 1.

¹⁴³ Vaillant-Couturier, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Vaillant-Couturier, 1.

the crowds, it would be a miscalculation to paint it with gushing terms as other scholars have, stating, for example, “unquestionably, the Expo of 1937 was a success, and attendance proved it. By the time it closed in November, it had sold well over two hundred million entrance tickets. It was no wonder: aside from all the displays, the restaurants, and the art shows, there were the many novelties of life at the fair.”¹⁴⁵ Such evidence does not make it an “unquestionable” indication of success. This seems a rather superficial final analysis of the Exposition which ignores the unmistakable political tension of the time. Basing the success on the fair on attendance and “novelties” rather than its effective political message marginalizes and trivializes the role of the exposition in the historical narrative once again.

So synonymous was the Popular Front and its political policies with the Exposition of 1937 that although Blum and the political coalition had been out of power since the summer, when it at last closed on November 25th, 1937, the right leaning *Le Matin* proclaimed “With the Exposition, the derogatory regime of the law of 40 hours ...ended yesterday.”¹⁴⁶ Even if it had gained more acceptance as being a success after the initial stumblings, so entwined with the politics of the Popular Front that there was plenty distaste for the exposition. For a brief moment it looked as if Paris might reopen the exposition in 1938 after garnering the support for that motion from the International Bureau of Expositions, the Municipal Council of Paris and the French Chamber of Deputies.¹⁴⁷ However, when it came time to be ratified by the French Senate, it was overwhelmingly shot down with the justification that they didn’t want to “see extended an exposition inaugurated by Léon Blum.”¹⁴⁸ The point had been made; the vision of peace as

¹⁴⁵ Bernier, 261.

¹⁴⁶ “L’Exposition est Fermée,” *Le Matin* 54eme année, Vol 19607 (26 Novembre, 1937), <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k585795g.langFR>>, 1-2.

¹⁴⁷ Henri Noguères, *La Vie Quotidienne en France au Temps du Front Populaire 1935-1938*, (Paris: Librarie Hachette, 1977), 279.

¹⁴⁸ Noguères, 280.

expressed by the Popular Front was not going to be elucidated again. What difference re-opening the exposition in 1938 would have made as an effort to prevent war will never be known. However, given the proclamation by the newspaper *Le Populaire* that the rejection had been the “work of barbarians,” many still had not soured on the idea of political rapprochement through cultural exchanges.¹⁴⁹

At the time, the significance of the 1937 *Exposition Internationale* seemed to be lost on nobody. Yet the events of 1938 and 1939 overshadowed the Exposition and its importance in the historical narrative. This is understandable considering how these later events were so tangibly more responsible for the precipitation for the Second World War than the failure of the 1937 Exposition. However, this should not diminish the importance of this World’s Fair in the “road to war” narrative. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, one of the most influential historians of French diplomatic relations in the lead-up to the Second World War called 1937 “a colorless year” and “one of the most inactive years in the history of French diplomacy.”¹⁵⁰ This may be so in terms of diplomacy in a traditional and literal sense. However, there is reason to believe that in 1937 the major diplomatic endeavor was the Exposition Internationale. In every sense, the Exposition was diplomacy by other means and featured much of the careful give and take that defines diplomacy. The lengths to which the French were willing to go to have the participation of Germany and their willingness to be “courted” by the Nazis, reveal not so much a weakness of France at the time but the cautious nature of the diplomatic game. Diplomacy calls for cool-headedness in the crafting of peace.

In the nations attempting to deal with the threat of Nazi aggression, the very precept of this even-keeled approach was questioned. Ambassador Poncet once complained to Bullitt about

¹⁴⁹ Noguères, 280.

¹⁵⁰ Duroselle, 255.

his American counterpart in Berlin, William Dodd for his inability to divorce his personal beliefs from his diplomatic service. In a message to Roosevelt, it was recounted that Poncet declared, “Bullitt, for Heaven's sake, get Dodd moved out of Berlin. He used to be bad as an Ambassador but now he is impossible.”¹⁵¹ Apparently, Dodd’s puritanical streak went so far as to berate Poncet for even inviting members of the Nazi party to the French embassy.¹⁵² The problem for France arose when they assumed that Hitler would play the game with the same manner of dignity and restraint. Considering the modern negative connotations of the Nazi regime, it seems jarring that Poncet would rant against Dodd's “personal crusade against the Nazi Government,” as he called it, but it reflects a profound faith in the sacredness of diplomacy as a gentleman's game as well as the expectation that the Nazis were without their own crusaders.¹⁵³ At the 1937 Exposition, the Popular Front, for all its promotion of peace and progressivism, did not wage an ideological crusade in its pavilions in the same way that the Germans did.

The 1937 Exposition was both a moment of great hope for the French and the great folly that was that hope. Certainly the optimism and goodwill the Popular Front government promoted in 1937 gave hope to many in a time of political and economic woes. The horrors of the Great War, not twenty years behind France, lingered in the minds of the public. The sense that another bloodletting was imminent made thinking about international cooperation through amusements perhaps more popular than it should have been. Apart from the 1937 Exposition, the thirties in France was the era of the romantic and escapist *chansons* of Maurice Chevalier, Charles Trenet and Edith Piaf. The popularity of songs such as *Je chante, Y'a d'la joie* or *Have Fun! Don't give a damn! Life is too short!* Reveals that the desire to duck away from the harsh realities of the

¹⁵¹ Bullitt, 23 November 1937, 235

¹⁵² Bullitt, 23 November 1937, 235

¹⁵³ Bullitt, 23 November 1937, 235.

time was not just a political miscalculation; it was a widespread cultural phenomenon.¹⁵⁴ Through music and dancehalls, cinemas and cafés, the French continued living with abandon, preferring to indulge their fantasies that the good times might last forever as they thought they might have during the *années folles*. “The city’s amusements that summer had a brittle, slightly hysterical quality,” it has been said, and the foreign policy pursued in the era of the Popular Front can be described in a similar manner.¹⁵⁵ The spring fever mentality which Ambassador Bullitt noted faded into a sort of summer joy, the sense that the Exposition had brought peace and understanding to the continent.

Indeed the foreign policy goal of merely seeking some sort of understanding with Germany fell flat. The essential problem with the exposition was not that it promoted peace, but rather it promoted a particular type of peace: peace by non-intervention. The *Quai d’Orsay* “made every possible effort to ensure the success of the non-intervention policy,” often to the point of preventing others from intervening.¹⁵⁶ The success of peace requires hard work, not passivity, and peace by non-intervention is anything but active. In spite of this passivity, it is inaccurate to characterize the 1930s as a period when the French government and its foreign policy makers essentially sleepwalked right into war and eventual defeat. Blum sought international peace but pressure also convinced him the need to rearm, at the cost of his political promises to dedicate spending to domestic welfare.

Blum did not make it out of 1937 unscathed; his political career briefly looked dead when the socialist government was swept out of office in June of that year, not a full month after the inauguration of the exposition and just over a year after it came to power.¹⁵⁷ The fall of Léon

¹⁵⁴ Weber, 231.

¹⁵⁵ Bernier, 258.

¹⁵⁶ Duroselle, 255.

¹⁵⁷ Bernier, 257.

Blum meant the rise of the center-right Radical Party and its Prime Minister, Camille Chautemps, although Chautemps nominally kept the Popular Front coalition together and followed many similar policies.¹⁵⁸ France continued down the path of ambivalence to the brutality in Spain, of wariness of Soviet Communism, and an over earnest hope that Hitler would see the light of international cooperation.

The 1937 Exposition may not have been the last step in the march towards war, but it was the last good reason in the 1930s to believe that peace would be possible. When the gates closed and the Germans moved their pavilion to Nuremburg, Hitler had fewer reasons to play nicely with the French. After the “two years of superficial calm” which “followed the occupation of the Rhineland,” Hitler pushed forward with his plans to expand Germany.¹⁵⁹ His cordiality towards the international community at the Olympics and the Exposition, and the mixed messages he sent in 1937, such as proclaiming “The period of surprises is over. Peace is our supreme blessing” vanished in 1938.¹⁶⁰ His demands became more insistent in 1938 and all of the groundwork laid by *rapprochement* and the cultural diplomacy of the 1937 Exposition served to the Führer’s favor as his annexation Austria and the Sudetenland were passively accepted by the international community. The feelings of goodwill produced by German’s 1937 pavilion and the so-called “cultural seduction” of France made National Socialism appear a palatable alternative to social chaos, economic instability and the threat of revolution and war. Didn’t the title of the Nazi guidebook say it all? *Deutschland in Paris*. Germany had already conquered France without a single shot being fired. 1937 was the moment of eclipse for French foreign policy. Before the war there would not again come the same chance to make its case not only as one of the great

¹⁵⁸ Bernier, 257.

¹⁵⁹ Bonnet, 159.

¹⁶⁰ Poncet, 218.

players on the European stage, but as the power to broker the peace. If France had barely been competent enough to organize an exposition, how could they be expected to organize the peace of Europe? After 1937 and the magnificent displays of social organization and theatrical demonstrations at the Exposition and the Olympics, it was National Socialism that would mend or break the fragile peace.

The quote which began this paper stated that 1937 was a curious year, “decidedly, sometimes sad and...often confusing,” and there truly is no better way to describe the disquieting calm before the storm feel of the Exposition.¹⁶¹ “So what does it signify” the quote asks, “the pause and non-intervention and shootings and resignation. Is it goodbye to the good times? Really? So quickly? So badly?”¹⁶² The end of those troubled, yet romantic Interwar Years, was not in 1939 when the *Drole de Guerre* began or even in 1940 when the Wehrmacht marched down the *Champs-Élysées*, but when the gates to the 1937 Exposition closed and the last chance for peace and international cooperation snuffed out.

¹⁶¹ Bordier, 114.

¹⁶² Bordier, 114.

Appendix



View from the esplanade of the newly constructed *Palais de Chaillot*¹⁶³

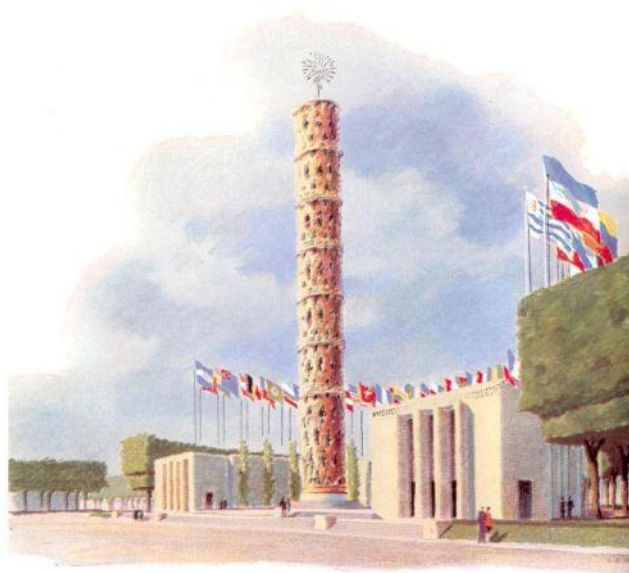


Illustration of the *Monument de la Paix*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Photo available from <<http://www.thebluegrassspecial.com/archive/2010/march10/imagesmarch10/Paris-1937Expo.jpg>>.

¹⁶⁴ Photo available from <http://www.lemog.fr/lemog_expo_v2/albums/documentation/autres_expo/paris_1937/normal_illus4917_paix_01.jpg>.



Boris Iofan's Pavilion of the Soviet Union¹⁶⁵



Side view of Soviet Pavilion¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Photo available from <http://elkriverharmonicas.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/images/1104.28894755_std.jpg>.

¹⁶⁶ Photo available from <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_uSIKw6xKFoE/SRjRNc-SkcI/AAAAAAAAACEk/zOw-tJF_8fw/s320/Soviet-Union-expo-Paris-1937-Mukhina-Worker+and+Kolkhoz+Woman.JPG>.



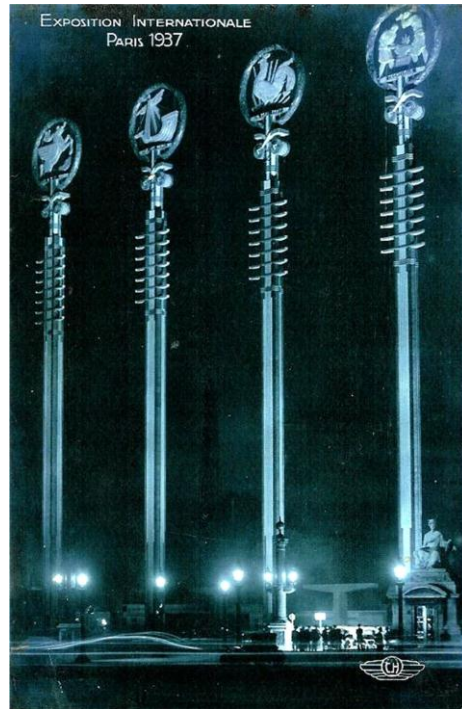
Albert Speer's Pavilion for Nazi Germany (*Deutsches Haus*)¹⁶⁷



Albert Speer showing Hitler his design, featured in Hoffman's *Deutschland in Paris*¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Photo available from <<http://nseuropa.org/English/Art/Paris1937.jpg>>.

¹⁶⁸ Photo available from <http://www.historytoday.com/sites/default/files/germania_main.jpg>.



Decorations at the Place de la Concorde on Bastille Day, 1937 ¹⁶⁹



The not so subtle inspiration ¹⁷⁰

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¹⁶⁹ Photo Available from <<http://www.oldstratforduponavon.com/images/paris1937.jpg>>.

¹⁷⁰ Photo Available from <http://www.militaryimages.net/photopost/data/710/6brandenburg_gate.jpg>.

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