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Summary Article: **Blum, Léon**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

French socialist politician, parliamentary leader of the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) in the inter-war period and the first socialist prime minister of France 1936–37, when his Popular Front government introduced paid holidays and the 40-hour working week in France. He was prime minister again in 1938 and 1946.

As prime minister leading a socialist–radical coalition supported in parliament by the communists, Blum negotiated the Matignon agreements on pay and conditions with employers and unions, which ended the spontaneous wave of factory occupations triggered by the Left's electoral victory in June 1936. He brought the Bank of France under state control, and nationalized the armaments industry.

Controversially, he also pursued a policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War. As France's first Jewish prime minister, Blum was subjected to vitriolic anti-Semitic attacks from France's extreme right. Arrested and imprisoned by the Vichy authorities in September 1940, and deported to Buchenwald following the adjournment of his trial at Riom in 1942, Blum was only released, by the Allies, in 1945.

Born into a middle-class Jewish family, a law graduate and member of the Conseil d'Etat, Blum was converted to socialism by Jean Jaurès during the Dreyfus affair in the late 1890s. At the party's 1920 Tours Congress he led the minority opposed to joining the Third International. Elected as an SFIO deputy 1919–40, Blum argued that socialists should distinguish between their 'exercise of power' (with a limited programme of reforms at a time of national crisis) and their 'conquest of power' (having won a clear mandate to reorganize society on socialist lines).

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