

# FRANCE, SALESMAN OF DEMOCRACY

BY ANDRE VISSON

AT THEIR really free and unfettered national elections, the French people were asked: Do you prefer a new Fourth Republic to a restoration of the pre-Vichy Third Republic? And if so, do you trust General de Gaulle to head it? Their answer was "yes" to both questions.

It is now our turn to ask: Do we need France for world peace? And if so, can the French Fourth Republic under General de Gaulle live up to its responsibilities?

The strategic importance of France for the United States was strongly re-emphasized in World War II. The fall of France sounded the last call for speeding up American defense. And it was from French beachheads that Americans launched their decisive drive to breach Hitler's fortress. True, the new age of rocket planes and atomic bombs may alter many strategic relationships. But if we believe that Britain's security is vital to the United States, we must remember, as Neville Chamberlain declared before the war, that Britain's frontier is in France — on the Rhine.

Furthermore, so long as the Atlantic Ocean — our defense line — was reinforced by the double bulwark of Britain and France — two strong and friendly nations — this country was safe. Once they weakened, the United States lay exposed to deadly peril.

Today, the need for a strong and politically sound Britain is recognized even by those Americans who dislike the Big Three's dominance of the United Nations' Security Organization. And the need for a strong and politically sound France was underlined at the Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco Conferences, which extended to France and China, at least officially, the co-equal and veto-exercising status claimed by the Big Three for themselves. France and China were also included in the Council of Foreign Ministers created by the Potsdam Conference. And at the Council's first meeting at London our insistence on France's right to participate in the discussion of Balkan affairs, now abandoned, was one of the reasons for our deadlock with Russia.

The recognition of France's priv-

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ileged status in the shaping of the postwar world is due at least as much to her political as to her strategic importance. Champion of European democracy since her revolution in 1789, France has remained the cornerstone of freedom in Western Europe, and has become the standard-bearer of many American-type political ideals and aspirations for the struggling democratic forces in Central and Eastern Europe. True, American democracy is historically, intellectually and spiritually much closer to the British. But it has been France's example much more than Britain's that has inspired the popular movements, elsewhere on the continent, which the United States is now striving to foster. Since the United States insists that those movements be given a chance to fulfill their aspirations, France remains potentially a most useful political associate, and a well-introduced salesman for American political ideas.

France has an advantage over England in the export of democratic ideas partly because of British insularity and partly too because of the high cost of education in British universities. Only a handful of European youths could afford to study at Oxford and Cambridge. But many generations of Poles and Rumanians, pre-revolutionary Russians and Serbs, Greeks and Italians, a good number of whom later became political leaders in their respective countries, were taught the basic principles of democracy in the universities of France.

So, when France fell in 1940, there was a general feeling that European democracy had gone down with it.

England, where the exiled governments of Europe found haven after the collapse of France, then became the rallying point for European democracy, but was, and still is, unable to take over its political leadership. To be sure, she made a bid for it. But centuries of aloofness from European political and cultural life could not easily be bridged. Moreover, as a result of her traditional policy of supporting the second strongest power on the continent, England had made various temporary allies, but few permanent friends. At the end, she was less known on the continent than was the remote United States, to which so many continental nations have sent generation after generation of their immigrant sons.

To be sure, European democracies were disappointed in France — by her military and moral weakness in the war and by the pre-war policies from which these weaknesses stemmed. They realize, however, that they cannot restore their continental family without its oldest member — France.

Moreover, the very fact that from 1940 to 1945 France was unable to play an active part in European affairs was rather to her advantage. By interfering in Greece and by compromising over Poland and Yugoslavia, England had alienated a good many friends and sympathizers in those countries. Had France been active in European affairs, she might have found herself obliged

to take similar actions, thus raising against herself similar resentments. But having been absent from the European diplomatic stage for five critical years, she escaped many painful responsibilities. Her leaders did not have to admit, as had Churchill, that in one country (Greece) they supported a king, and in another country (Yugoslavia) a Communist. It is true that France has lost her former prestige as a great military power. She can no longer extend to the small states of the Danubian Basin the military protection she was promising them before the war. But she can now present herself with a pretty clear record in international affairs, as far as Europe is concerned. And if France truly revives, she may well recapture her former leadership of Europe's democratic forces.

## II

Now, what chances has the French Fourth Republic to achieve a national resurgence?

The November elections have shown that the French people are determined to make democracy work. Disgusted with the inefficient and unstable political regimes which followed one another in hopeless succession during the last decades of the Third Republic — forty-one different governments between 1920 and 1940 — they nevertheless rejected by an overwhelming majority all totalitarian or authoritarian political solutions. Under General de Gaulle's leadership they suc-

ceeded in crossing the critical stage of liberation both from the Nazi occupation and the Vichy regime, without revolutionary concussions, and they hope to establish their new Republic also without concussions.

The French speak the same basic language of democracy as do the Americans and the British. But they are not looking for American solutions of their economic and social problems. Their three major political parties — Communist, Socialist and Popular Republican — which together polled about 14,200,000 out of 19,600,000 votes, and obtained 428 seats out of the 586 in the Constituent Assembly, all advocate the gradual nationalization of key industries — mines, electric power, big banks and insurance companies. All three parties favor socialism but each has its own distinct variety: the totalitarian brand of the Communists, and middle-of-the-road British-style socialism of the Socialists, and the Christian socialism of the Popular Republicans.

The French people were already moving to the left before the war. The pre-war parties continually outbid one another in the vehemence and flamboyance of their appeals to the electorate. Most of them tried to appear much more radical than they really were. One of the rightist parties called itself "Progressive." Two of the center parties called themselves "Left Republicans" and "Republicans of the Left." And the great middle-of-the-road and slightly left-of-center party claimed to be "Radical-Social-

-ist." But — as the French were saying of themselves — while they were "wearing their heart on the Left, their checkbook was on the Right." By instinct and tradition they were conservative in their economic outlook.

It is, therefore, indeed surprising to see the French, extreme individualists, always so jealous of their freedom and independence, now turning to state control and state ownership as a cure for their economic and social ills. But it was just this extreme individuality which helped to undermine French capitalism. A capitalist economy flourishes only when all classes, rich and poor, place their common stakes in its success above their own divergent interests. It depends upon voluntary national solidarity. In France, however, rampant individualism shattered the rock of national unity, and capitalism foundered. As André Siegfried wrote about his compatriots: "With enough for his own wants, the Frenchman ignores with beaming self-satisfaction everything that does not appertain to his own community, almost to his own person." Thus, French individualism, amounting almost to egoism, made the adjustment of a capitalistic system to national solidarity extremely difficult.

In addition, the series of French financial political scandals, publicized by the press between the two wars, made many Frenchmen ask themselves whether there was not something fundamentally wrong with the capitalistic system as practiced in France.

Finally, the German occupation and the Vichy regime deprived them of the stimulating opportunity to unite all social classes in a national war effort, similar to that of their Allies.

This explains the desire of the French people to see capitalism in their country subjected to "structural reforms." But being a nation of small farmers, small artisans, small tradesmen and small rentiers, the French, by an overwhelming majority, voted for those parties which, while urging "structural reforms," nevertheless stood for the retention of private enterprise for small and medium economic units, and put strong emphasis on the maintenance of civil liberties. This encourages us to believe that France has both the will and the capacity to stage a come-back as a political democracy.

### III

The Communists, despite the most skillful propaganda exploiting all the factors in their favor — the prestige of the Red Army, their own prestige in the Resistance, and the ills of inflation — were unable to gather more than 26 per cent of the total vote. Of the 5,004,121 French men and women who sent 145 Communists to the Constituent Assembly, only 2,321,000 voted the straight Communist Party ticket. The majority of the Communist vote, 2,700,000, was not obtained under the Party label, but came rather from various Communist-controlled resistance groups, which

entered the elections under such confusing titles as "United Resistance Movement" or the "Front National."

The Socialists polled 4,788,578 votes (about 216,000 less than the Communists) which entitled them to 138 seats. But out of this over-all vote, 3,427,810 went to the straight Socialist Party ticket — about 1,100,000 more than was obtained by the straight Communist Party ticket.

The Communists nevertheless remain a most important factor. Should the two democratic parties, the Socialists and the Popular Republicans, fail to work together and to check inflation, the Communists will certainly make political capital of the situation. To seize power, however, they will have to use other methods than democratic elections.

The Socialists and the Communists have fiddled many identical political and social tunes, but on great moral and philosophical issues they remained fundamentally divided. The Socialists believe in individual freedom, respect the will of the majority, and are determined to carry on the historic French banner of the Rights of Man.

Having, after the 1936 elections, cooperated with the Communists in the prewar *Front Populaire*, the Socialists are still willing to cooperate with them in the Constituent Assembly, but should the Communists ask too high a price, the Socialists can get along without them. There is a new party on the right — the Popular Republican Movement (M.R.P.) — which fought with them and with

the Communists in the Resistance, and which subscribes to many of the "structural reforms."

The Popular Republican Movement polled, in France proper, 4,500,000 votes, the greatest number of any single political party, and sent a total of 145 deputies to the Assembly. With the Socialists, it wants to carry on the fight for the Rights of Man. But it adds to the "structural reforms" and to the Rights of Man something important of its own — Spiritual Rebirth. The Popular Republicans believe that Christian principles are "the best model for human conduct yet evolved" and dare to proclaim it. Among Anglo-Saxon nations, this statement of faith contains nothing new or startling. But it is a revolutionary concept for a French political party of the left. To Americans, the Popular Republicans seem revolutionary by their social and economic program of state control. To the French, they seem "revolutionary" by their political and religious philosophy.

The French Third Republic inherited the historic conflict between the French Revolution and the Catholic Church — a tragic source of discord in a country with an overwhelmingly Catholic population. It resulted in the separation of the Church from the State in 1905. In the smallest village of France, the school teacher and the parish priest have represented opposite poles of political and social ideologies.

But the Church never gave up hope. It helped to organize Christian

trade-unions. It came closer to the working masses than did the anti-clerical "liberal" parties of the middle classes such as the Radical-Socialists.

The active participation in the Resistance of the parish priests and the Christian trade-unions paved the way for the amazing success of the Popular Republicans. Starting as a political and spiritual movement in the Resistance, the Popular Republicans offered to the French, for the first time in their history, an opportunity to vote simultaneously for Joan of Arc — standard-bearer of French Nationalism, taken over by the Church — and for the Jacobin principles of the French Revolution. A bridge between the Church and the Republic, this party appealed to many French women, who, voting for the first time, wanted both a thorough sweep of the Third Republic and recognition of the Church's spiritual leadership.

In a predominantly Catholic land, the Popular Republicans have, naturally, a predominant Catholic following. But they regard themselves as a non-sectarian movement of Christian or, even still broader, religious citizens, who reject Marxist materialism but accept certain Socialist theories as the political expression of their religious principles. The political potentialities of the Popular Republicans can perhaps be best judged by the Communist reaction. Communists, more fearful of this new party than of the Socialists, describe it as a Trojan horse loaded with "Catholic-Fascists."

It is, certainly, a most encouraging portent for the future of democracy in France, as well as in other European countries which have looked to France for spiritual leadership, that a politico-religious movement, determined to achieve social justice through the spiritual revival of a nation, could attain such sensational prominence almost overnight.

If France is to achieve national and moral rehabilitation, Socialists and Popular Republicans must agree, with or without the Communists.

#### IV

Of all the urgent problems facing France, that of population is the most important in the long run. The rate of growth of the French population, which even before the war was the lowest in Europe, has now vanished completely. In 1943, civilian deaths over births was 20,295; in 1944 it was 107,972. France, the most populous European country in the early eighteenth century, was passed by Russia a few decades later, by Germany about 1870, by Britain about 1900, and by Italy about 1930. Her 1940 population of 41.2 million is expected to fall to 36.9 million in 1970 unless desperate measures, on which French leaders are already feverishly working, block the present rate of decrease.

Coal is the key to France's economic recovery. She imported, before the war, one-third of her coal, over half of her coke, and practically all of her oil. But she produced almost 90 per

cent of her wheat consumption, and has sufficient steel. Once she succeeds in raising coal production, she will be able to get back on her feet economically, provided she succeeds in checking inflation and reestablishing a sound and stable currency.

Economically, France is a "good risk." Twice she recovered very quickly — after the wars of 1870-1871 and 1914-1918. She has a good chance of recovering from this war too. Politically, the rising strength of the Popular Republicans attests to the ability of the French Fourth Republic to produce the new and vigorous democratic leadership vitally necessary for France's revival.

As for de Gaulle, Americans have no reason to distrust him so long as he has the confidence of such unquestionably democratic parties as the French Socialists and Popular Republicans.

And it would help the French people to know that both the American government and the American people will applaud the rebirth of a strong and politically sound France. Many Frenchmen have suspected otherwise during the last three years. The cold shoulder which the Roosevelt administration turned toward de Gaulle for so long evoked considerable distrust of America, but our error in miscalculating the efforts of the Free French movement was an honest one. We had no desire either to hamper de Gaulle, or to impose upon France a puppet regime "friendly" to the United States.

General de Gaulle himself realized

this. On his second visit to the United States, in August 1945, he publicly recognized the necessity for France to follow American leadership. This is, indeed, the *only* foreign leadership which France is today willing to accept.

In December 1944, France signed a military alliance with the Soviet Union in order to insure herself against Germany. But to assure her own revival and to obtain over-all military protection she is looking westward. There she first meets England. But she knows that England's assistance, which is assured to her whether or not it is confirmed by diplomatic treaty, can have full value only if England is backed by the United States. For this reason, France would like to deal with the United States directly, without Britain as intermediary. Geographically a continental halfway-house between the United States and the Soviet Union, France feels that she may become, for a Europe in search of a new equilibrium, a political and social halfway-house more important even than Laborite England.

France is looking for a new democratic formula to resolve not only her own social and economic ills but also those of other European peoples. The survival of democracy in Europe depends upon her success. It is, therefore, to the interest of America that the voice of France — even if she speaks the language of democracy with an unfamiliar economic accent — becomes strong enough to resound throughout Europe.





# THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

## *Drama With Cow-Bells*

THE question as to the critical merit of propaganda in drama once again this season has climbed atop its own soap-box and has lifted its dual voice with more of its customary eloquence, and still more of its customary vehemence. The arguments pro and con have mainly followed the established patterns. The pros have had at the cons with the familiar retort that most drama is propaganda of one sort or another, however the propaganda be concealed or unrecognized as such, and that there is no more sound reason against its presence than against the stage's electrical equipment's, which similarly sheds a valuable light on things. The cons in turn have had at the pros with the equally familiar thrust that propaganda, or what is theatrically defined as such, has no place in any play that pretends even faintly to dramatic art, and that its proper place is elsewhere, if indeed [*business of being loftily cynical*] anywhere at all.

While one is privileged to doubt whether there are two sides to every question, since a contrary belief would be hospitable to anyone who maintained that the earth was flat and that the Martini cocktail is a wonderful appetizer, there may be two to the

question at issue, though it is to be suspected that one considerably outweighs the other.

When the talk is of propaganda, one takes it to mean not advocacy of those elements in private and personal life with which the pros seek cagily to camouflage their argument, but advocacy of elements in public, national and international life. And by advocacy is meant in turn, very plainly, not soft persuasion, not insinuation, and not suggestion arising naturally out of the drama itself but rather largely independent insistence, exhortation and even command. The difference is that between a playwright who proves his plea, whatever it may be, for his drama instead of permitting his drama to prove it for him. And the further difference is that between a green traffic light which automatically indicates progress and a traffic cop who accompanies it with a loud, peremptory "Go!"

## II

Propaganda as we get it in the contemporary drama is that traffic cop, usually further equipped with a shrill whistle.

More than anything else it is this