

AFTER A REVOLUTION

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PARIS

In Paris today almost everybody is discovering his attachment to de Gaulle. Some say they have never ceased to trust the General, others claim to have predicted long ago his return to power. Many have told me—among them Jean-Marie Domenach, editor of the leftist Catholic *Esprit*—that there still exists a kind of “network of the Resistance” inherited from wartime, now consisting of sentimental attachment of the earlier members to each other and of loyalty to de Gaulle. It was also Domenach who told me of a conversation he had had with the General two years ago. On that occasion de Gaulle expressed his lack of respect for those who paraded, for years, in the name of his Movement, and called himself the “only true revolutionist” in France, a man deserted and misunderstood by the pseudo-revolutionists who claimed to be his followers.

The fact is apparent that de Gaulle is largely popular and trusted—although he still remains a question mark—except on the extreme Right and the almost-extreme, non-Communist Left. I attended a meeting organized by the friends of *Aspects de la France* (whose initials are the same, and not by coincidence, as those of the pre-war *Action Française*) where not only the parliamentary system and democracy, but even de Gaulle, were repudiated, and where Soustelle and the colonels were openly favored. The non-Communist Left considers de Gaulle a necessary but unhappy compromise. Claude Bourdet, editor of the influential weekly *France-Observateur*, told me that the General does not quite know what to do with his power and is already tied down by various financial and business interests, represented by some of the ministers in his cabinet.

Between the two extreme—and extremely pessimistic—views, where does the French population stand? I claim no special insight into the mechanisms of mass-psychology, nor can I interview representatives of the man-in-the-street other than the waiter, the barber and the taxi driver. But this much is clear: the French masses are not interested in politics, whether on the level of principles or in the day-by-day action of the National Assembly. The Fourth Republic passed out without anyone's noticing or regretting it, and people in general do not seem to be alarmed at the presence of de Gaulle and his new team.

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This does not mean that the General represents a “father image;” only psychologists, enamored of words, think that they have solved a problem by introducing such terms. The truth is that de Gaulle commands respect and authority even among those who are either skeptical of the future or who, because of their Marxist convictions, see in him an instrument of reactionary forces. Many compare him to Mustapha Kemal, and expect of him the purification of the nation's political mores, new institutions, a restoration of France's international prestige.

And these are not empty words or empty expectations. There is no question that de Gaulle is a born leader, possessing that indispensable quality of all leadership, boundless confidence in himself. I have talked to a number of people who know him, who have met him recently, or who are now in frequent contact with him. These men, without an exception, reflect in some way de Gaulle's personality. In a country where the critical faculty is extremely developed, where everybody is a born iconoclast, de Gaulle manages to charm and to transfigure his interlocutors who, even in the rare instance when they dislike him, are nevertheless affected by his inner power. To have seen a Malraux, as I saw him at his memorable press conference, speaking fanatically of his chief, equating the latter's destiny with that of France, is to be persuaded that the man is one of the greatest figures of French history in modern times.

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Now what about the colonels? For M. Bourdet, they are a band of Fascists who may have been bluffing when they threatened the Pflimlin government with an invasion of the mainland by parachutists, but who now consider themselves the winners of this poker game. If they manage to impose their will on de Gaulle, they will take over the state and install a Mussolinian regime.

In order to hear the opposite view, one does not even have to attend the *Aspects de la France* meeting I mentioned, where the colonels are hailed as saviors of France and Algeria and as the future conquistadores of Tunisia and Morocco. I was invited to have lunch with a group of very sharp young intellectuals, grouped around Pierre Boutang, himself in his early thirties and editor of the rightist weekly, *La Nation Française*. Conversation in the restaurant was not easy with Boutang eating, proof-reading and talking at the same time, but the opinions of these men are so firm and are expressed with such fervor that one leaves the table with clear impressions.

For the *Nation Française* group, the colonels are essentially non-political. They quoted to me stories to prove that Massu has a highly developed sense of duty and discipline, even though some of his subordinates—younger officers—are more impatient and more obstinate. Thus according to Boutang and his friends, the colonels have nothing in common with

Franco's fellow-generals in 1936, but rather with Nasser and his associates.

It is interesting to note in this respect that the example of Franco, the Spanish Civil War, and the Falangists is practically never mentioned in the French rightist press. This is all the more significant because in the late thirties, and then again before and during the Petain regime, the Spanish example was constantly pointed out as a model for France to imitate. Today—and this is actually or tacitly recognized by the entire French press with the exception of the Communists—the French military have serious *social* preoccupations and are opposed to the ultra-conservatism of the extremist French colonis. The Left brands this social preoccupation “paternalistic,” but then it is at least possible that the backward territories of Africa need some kind of paternalism.

At any rate, many agree that the Algerian colonels have a deep concern not only for the pacification of the land, but also for the destinies of the Arab population. Yet the role, movements, and intentions of these officers remain enigmatic. On the 13th of May they had won something which, whatever they say about previous preparation, fell quite unexpectedly into their laps. Therefore the wildest speculations are permitted with regard to their future actions, and I would even say that they seem to encourage all these interpretations in order to keep their adversaries guessing.

M. Maurice Duverger, Sorbonne professor of law and a brilliant political writer in *Le Monde*, tells me that the Army would never dare stage a coup d'Etat if de Gaulle remains in power. But it seems that the Army, or at least its Algerian section, wants to play precisely the arbiter's role, and it is not impossible that violent action, even if not now envisaged, might be among the instruments to be used in case of a show-down.

It must be understood—and this is of capital importance—that the French army is no longer a conservative bloc. Most of the officers now playing the star-roles, and many of the quite young ones of whom the American public does not hear by name, but who execute and often initiate orders and measures, have learned a great deal in the long Indo-chinese war.

What did they learn? Two things: first, the importance of the revolutionary *technique* in modern warfare, fought by, for, and in the name of, the people; secondly, as Trotsky and Lenin had said, the even greater importance of *faith*, which can move mountains and masses. Thus we witness the strange phenomenon that the French army is no longer the one which was so miserably involved in the Dreyfus case at the turn of the century, but one whose officers read and study the writings of the Russian revolutionists and Mao Tse tung. Today they may even understand Nasser better than Petain.

Will this Army eventually lead France and, if so, in what direction? Like de Gaulle's features, the in-

telligent and urbane face of a Colonel Lacheroy, one of the Army's chief theorists in Algeria, hides a secret. It may be a secret heavy with the future.

In the last ten years, life in Paris has changed very little on the surface. At the end of June, the tourists had not yet invaded the cafes and the boulevards. The ones who are here blend with the population, except when they walk in easily recognizable groups equipped with that sign of the international fraternity of tourists, the camera.

The life I see has changed not at all, and it easily brings back my own childhood memories in other parts of Europe. Much is said these days about the Americanization of the world and of Western Europe in particular. After a few short weeks, I must say I saw very little of it. There are snack-bars in Paris and the hot dog is popular, people eat hasty lunches in self-service restaurants and adolescents wear blue jeans. But the capacity of Paris—and of French life—to absorb and assimilate new things and modes seems to be lasting. There is so much here that is old, so much of “tradition” (in the full sense of this worn-out term) in the soft lines of streets, buildings and life in general, such smooth-working routine that novelty itself appears in a modest garb and seems to aspire to age and respectability.

This is vacation time for a college teacher, but also an excellent time for visiting other schools. How could I resist taking an exploratory tour of the Ecole Normale Superieure where, since the time of Napoleon, the French elite is prepared?

Every year thirty selected students are admitted in the humanities, and somewhat more in science. They take courses and do research while also attending the university as full-time students. Although only a minority choose teaching as a profession, they receive a salary equivalent to that of lycee professor, with room and board deducted. The country's best library and a laboratory for nuclear research equipped with a cyclotron are at the students' disposal. In addition, they have the satisfaction of studying in the classrooms and sleeping in the cubicles which saw before them Taine and Jaures, Romain Rolland and Herriot.

Two young professor-tutors (somewhat in the Oxford fashion), one a teacher of Greek, the other of Latin, entertained me and introduced me to some students. Fortunately, progressive education has not penetrated these walls nor, for that matter, other schools. There are signs everywhere of serious work and serious commitment. The students prepare varied careers, from politics and journalism to engineering and the priesthood. But as Professor Sirinelli, himself an alumnus, explained to me, no antagonism divides his students because they respect in each other the sincere search for truth. “We believe in effort and hard work,” one of the students said to me. “Whatever becomes of France, an elite will always be needed. We are ready to serve.”