

# The authoritarianism of the Fifties

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**D**E GAULLE *au pouvoir!* The cry—emerging out of the xenophobia of Le Pen and Biaggi, the plots of the Chaban Delbas and Delbeques, the manipulations of Soustelle, de Serigny and the U.S.R.A.F. apparatus—has acquired establishment status, in Britain as well as in France.

Here in Britain the too easy acceptance of the *regime*, the reassuring presentation of any advance in De Gaulle's power as a liberal and constitutional victory, the silence of even the Labour Party, suggests a withering of democratic principle, not confined to France. The shadow of Massu and the *paras*, the double-cross of Guy Mollet, the blackmail of President Coty, that lunatic celebration in the cars of the *colons* in Algiers and the *merveilleux* in the Champs-Élysées—these landmarks on the General's road to power are conveniently forgotten, as quickly as possible. Everything is being done to focus attention away from the crucial issues with which the collapse of the Fourth Republic faces Western Europe. For its collapse says too much about the malaise not only of France but of our whole West European society. The French crisis has exposed the rhetoric of liberalism—the bourgeois counterpoint to the Stalinist mythology—as a complex of apologetics masking the structural degeneration of a society. It poses questions which we must attempt to answer.

Why did democracy fail—in France? How could France slide from the *elan* of the liberation into the acceptance—at best resigned, at worst cynically chauvinistic—of *Algérie-Française*?

*Des la Résistance à la Révolution*, the famous heading of *Combat*, proclaimed a hope and an expectation common to all sections of the Resistance. The ignominy of July 10, 1940, had been purged in the heroism of the underground struggle. And the lessons of that surrender—compound of ruling-class treason and Republican cowardice—appeared to have been learned by all. The classical Right—so compromised by the Vichy surrender—had disappeared from French politics. As yet it had no successors. The Communist Party, vanguard of the Resistance, *parti des fusilles*, seemed to have atoned for the disastrous line of 1939-1940. The Socialist Party had expelled those of its deputies (they had been a majority) who had voted for Petain. The new M.R.P., which was to unite with the Communists and Socialists in forming the post-liberation government, appeared first as a party of "social" Catholicism: in 1945 its leader, M. Bidault, was proclaiming "La Révolution par la loi." The social bases of the new Republic seemed defined and symbolized in the liberation of Paris: in Bellville and Menilmontant barricades in every street; in Passy and Auteuil the guilty silence of the bourgeoisie, *collabo* and *conformiste*. In Mauviac's words: "Only the working class had remained faithful to France in her distress and her humiliation."

How different an inauguration from the Third Republic! Then, France had entered the Republic, in Gambetta's phrase, "backwards." Then the Republic had been founded on the bloody suppression of the Paris working class. Then, the Republican constitution had been voted by a predominantly monarchist assembly, unable to agree on the rival claims of Bourbon, Orleans and Bonaparte. And yet the constitution of 1875, founded in so malignant a political context, under constant and dangerous attack from the start, was defended,

successfully, for sixty-five years. Only with the massive aid of the Nazi occupation did the French Right succeed, finally, in destroying it.

Why did the Fourth Republic, founded on so much more favourable bases, founded indeed upon the elimination of the Right, prove less resilient to authoritarian pressure than the Third? The reason is to be found in its exact reversal of the pattern of Republican defence. The fundamental pull in the Third Republic was always to the Left; the political contours of French society were constantly re-shaped to meet the pressures of the Left, to associate the working class more closely with the defence of Republican Institutions. The constant tendency was for all Republicans to unite (1877, against the monarchists; 1885, against Boulangism; 1902, Left Bloc; 1924, Left Cartel; 1936, Popular Front). *Pas d'ennemis à gauche*—the slogan of the Radicals—had been the saving principle of the Third Republic, serving it in every crisis except its last. In the Fourth Republic, on the contrary, governments were formed in a process of mutual blackmail between the Right and the Centre and based upon the political outlawing of a quarter of the electorate—the Communist Left. The centre of political gravity moved constantly rightwards after the expulsion of the Communists from the Three Party coalition in 1947. The Third Force government "defeated" the threat of the new Gaullist Right by stealing its anti-Communist programme, peeling off layer after layer of Gaullist support, absorbing the Right into the anti-Communist Front. From 1947 to 1951 governments moved from Left Centre to Right Centre, governing with the tacit support of the re-emergent Classical Right. Powerless to command a complete majority itself, the Right increasingly dictated the degree and direction of governmental action. By 1952, just eight years after the Liberation, it was possible for Antoine Pinay, a former national counsellor of Petain, to lead a government. As the political configuration of the country moved dramatically Rightwards, so too did the politicians: Mollet and Bidault, "Lefts" in the 1945-47 period, emerge as the extreme chauvinists and neo-fascists of the late 'fifties, Bidault as the parliamentary "front" for the Algerian *Colons*, Mollet as chief executioner of the Republic. *Pas d'ennemis à droite*—the brief existence of the Fourth Republic is a commentary on the logic of this political pattern.

*Pas d'ennemis à droite*—the guiding political principle of the Fourth Republic—was above all the product of the Cold War. France was its first storm-centre: the *elan* and unity of the Resistance its first victim. France was to live out, more intensely than any other country in Europe, the prolonged agony of the Cold War. It erupted quite suddenly in 1947 France. The apparent inevitability of the process should not blind us to its rapidity, nor to its peculiarly violent distortion of the pattern of French political life. In June 1947, as the imperatives of the Cold War grew ever more totalitarian, Claude Bourdet wrote:

"We are told that we must choose between East and West, between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., between De Gaulle and the Communists. Must we give up our desperate desire to represent a civilization on the very narrow margin between the two worlds? . . . Perhaps this flimsy, this Utopian barrier, formed by a few million Europeans, who wish to be neither

with the East nor with the West, may yet prove the insuperable obstacle to the disasters that threaten our epoch."

But by then it was too late. By then the Communists had been expelled from the government. By the autumn De Gaulle was sweeping the entire lower middle class and bourgeoisie behind the R.P.F. to win, in the full flood of the anti-Communist hysteria, 40% of the local election votes. By November the Communists, moving with the new Cominform line, were unleashing a wave of violent strikes. By December Jules Moch was sending troops and C.R.S. to shoot down the workers. The iron curtain had fallen across France. The Third Force government proclaimed the defence of the Republic on Two Fronts: against Right and Left extremes. But their method was to present themselves—abroad to Washington, at home to the *patronat*—as better, more effective anti-Communists than the Gaullists. Anti-Communism forced successive governments into alliance with ever-increasing sections of the re-emergent Right. Anti-Communism merged government action with the employers' drive against working-class living standards. Anti-Communism—giving the "Atlantic" sanction to a ruinous colonial war—delivered France for eight years into the hands of the French Indo-Chinese companies. De Gaulle might declare the Communists to be "separatists," to be no part of the national community: it was left to the "Third Force" governments, branding each strike a Communist plot, sending the C.R.S. against each picket line, to show in practice that the Fourth Republic had outlawed the French working class.

In 1958, France was burdened with the end-products of a Cold War implacably waged to its disastrous conclusion: the most rigorously Stalinist Communist Party in Europe confronted a degenerated Social Democracy to divide and paralyse the working class in its hour of danger. Each Party fed on the corruption and betrayal of the other.

## **Indian spring**

Yet this final tragedy of the Cold War was not inevitable. For in the winter and in the young spring of 1956 Europe, and with it France, was given that second chance so rarely offered to societies set rigid in their attitudes of hate and fear. Perhaps we have forgotten that brief dawn which seemed to herald the ending of the political ice-age. In the East the prisoners were returning from the dead. Bubnov could be seen in Moscow, Gomulka in Warsaw: living evidence, so it seemed, that the Twentieth Congress declarations of "socialist legality" and "different roads to socialism" had inaugurated a new reality. Krushchev in Belgrade, Malenkov in London were liquidating the international legacy of Stalinism, untidily, but exuberantly. And nowhere did hope seem greater than in France. On the brink of the final Cold War insanity France had turned back: Dien Bien Phu had been followed not by an extension of the Indo-Chinese war, but by its dramatic liquidation. There, the economic stagnation of a quarter-century had been decisively broken. The Mendes-France experience had suggested the arrival of a dynamic, welfare capitalism to match the quickening pace of economic activity. True, the revival had been checked. German rearmament had been forced through an unwilling assembly; Mendes-France had been overthrown; colonial war had been resumed, this time in Algeria. But the check seemed only a pause. For the conscripts were resisting the new war. And January 1956 brought the triumphant return of a Republican Front government pledged to make peace in Algeria.

The mood of hope which had swept the Republican Front to power was to be of pitifully short duration. The government was invested on January 31, 1956: within seven days its Prime Minister, Guy Mollet, had surrendered himself\*and

the future of France into the hands of the *colons* in Algeria. On February 6, 1956, Algiers became the capital of France.

The Algerianization of France, which reached its apogee on May 13, 1958, was a process whose origins are to be found in the early post-war years. For a century before then, to the Constantine massacres in 1945, the *Presence Francaise* had been maintained by a complex of repression and paternalism. In the new post-war world, with the nationalist wave sweeping the Maghreb, and with the Paris politicians adopting the rhetoric of "association" and "integration," the method appeared to change. But the basic dishonesty of the new French policy was revealed in the contradictions of the 1947 Statute which was to govern the future of Algeria. The Statute denied that Algeria was a nation, and declared it a French Department: yet it gave the country a measure of home rule. The Statute proclaimed the absolute equality of Muslim and European: but of the two electoral colleges only the second was to have an electorate which reflected the Muslim predominance in the land. Yet even the emasculated liberalism of this Statute was too dangerous for the *colons*. The maintenance of settler dominance was not compatible with a nationalist majority in the second college. The Statute was systematically manipulated by successive French governors and sabotaged by the Settlers. Elections were rigged, parliaments packed with the stooge nominees of the *colons*. Behind the constitutional facade, European supremacy was maintained. Home rule was settler rule, practised with the collaboration of successive French governors, and covered, through all the repeated scandals, by the silence of the governments in Paris.

For seven years the Algerian nationalists attempted to work within the framework of the 1947 Statute, but in November 1954, faced with a mounting colonialist attack, the F.L.N. launched a war of national liberation. Defeated in Indo-China, forced to retreat from Morocco and Tunisia, the French colonialists turned the full force of frustrated nationalism to a repression which rapidly mounted to almost genocidal proportions. By 1956 400,000 French troops were engaged in fighting the F.L.N. The *colon* demand for ever-increasing military assistance ran parallel to the progressive removal of political initiative from Paris. The more the *colon* talked of the indissoluble links between France and Algeria, the more separatist their actions became. The Mollet government had designated General Catroux as Governor-General to implement the promises of January 1956: Algiers forced his resignation and dominated the actions of his successor, Lacoste: Mollet entered secret negotiations with the F.L.N.: they were sabotaged by the kidnapping of Ben Bella, instigated by the local army commanders, covered by the incredible cowardice of the government at Paris. Driven by the pressures of their own increasing chauvinism and by their hysterical fear of a Popular Front, Mollet and Lacoste surrendered, on every crucial issue, to the multi-angled political pull of the *colon*. From Mollet's initial surrender of February 6, through the kidnapping of Ben Bella and the bombardment of Sakiet to the final *coup de force* of the Committees of Public Safety, the Algerian *colon*, the parachute colonel and the military commander gave their own twisted shape to the politics not only of Algeria, but also of Metropolitan France.

## **Algerie Francaise**

At one level, Algeria seemed to repeat the pattern of the war in Indo-China. Policy was shaped in Algiers as before it had been shaped at Saigon. The classic colonialist bloc was quickly formed: the military commanders, the poor whites, the big banks. Then it had been General Navarre,

the *Banque d'Indo Chine* and the Saigon clique; now it was the Algiers conspiracy, the *Banque Parisienne-Mirabaud* and Massu. Buttressed by powerful lobbies at the Palais Bourbon, they manipulated parliament where they could, countermanded its orders and frustrated its intentions where they could not.

Yet there was a different quality to France's involvement in Algeria. The corruption of Indo-China had been restricted to the upper echelons of French society; the working class had identified itself with Ho Chi Minh, it had demonstrated against *La Sale Guerre*. But the corruption of Algeria engulfed the whole of French society. *Algerie Francaise* was not simply the desperate slogan of the lunatic fringe *colons*: it evoked the deepest, most nationalist responses in the French people itself. Algeria was not a far-off colony like Viet Nam. It was peopled by a million Frenchmen. Its people, its administration, its products had been seen, always, as completely French. To lose Algeria would be to lose an integral part of France; like Alsace-Lorraine in 1871 it would signify a political and moral loss of staggering proportions. In the early days of the war the French people's desire for peace had been stronger than their belief in *Algerie Francaise*. Moreover, the parties of the Left—Mendesistes, Socialists, Communists—were proclaiming that a pacific solution to the war was both possible and necessary. The French mood charged dramatically with the collapse of the Left opposition to the war. The Socialists, under Guy Mollet, moved over to an "ultra" position; the Mendesiste Radicals were polarized on the competing claims of colonialism and reason; finally, and most disastrously, the Communist Party, manoeuvring for parliamentary unity with the Socialist Party, sacrificing principle for the possibility of a French break from the American alliance, abandoned their active opposition to the war and voted special powers for Mollet's Algerian policy. The movement for peace in Algeria suddenly lost its political support; there were now no obstacles to the mounting wave of chauvinism which soon engulfed the socialist leadership and made opposition to the war an increasingly impossible task.

## A generation

From the identification of France with her million settlers there followed another, more terrible, involvement. For the first time in French history a government felt strong enough to use conscripts, on a massive and ever-extending scale, to fight a colonial war. The entire French conscript army was moved from France to Algeria. And as the demands of the war grew to monstrous dimensions, France made the ultimate sacrifice: her new generation. The young people of France were dragged into a total participation in the war. Active opponents of the war when they received their papers, silent witnesses to settler atrocity on their first arrival in Algeria, they became, finally, active agents in the whole complex of settler terrorism, genocidal vengeance and individual torture which the war had become. Here is a soldier's letter which bears witness to the collapse of a civilization, the tragedy of a generation:

"They were asking for volunteers to shoot the guys that had been tortured (that way, there were no traces and no worry about a fuss being made). Personally, I didn't like it. It's true, you know: shooting down a guy from 100 yards in combat, that didn't worry me, because he was at a distance, and you can't see him too well. He's armed, and he can defend himself or take cover if he has to. But shooting a guy down, like that, defenceless, in cold blood . . . no! So I never volunteered, and it turned out I was the only one in our section who hadn't shot "his" guy. They called me *petite fille*. One day, the captain called me: "I don't like *petites filles*. Get ready, the next will be yours." So, a few days later, we had eight prisoners they

had tortured to finish off. I was called out before all the boys. They said: "He's yours, *petite fille*, shoot." I approached the guy: he looked at me. I can still see his eyes looking at me . . . It disgusted me . . . I fired. The boys shot down the others. Afterwards, I didn't mind so much, but the first time, I promise you, it did something to me. . . . Maybe it's not very clean work; but really, all those guys are criminals when you think of it. If you let them go, they start again, killing old folk, women and children. After all you can't let them do that. When you come down to it, we're clearing the country of all this riff-raff . . . and then those guys want Communism, so you understand?"  
(Cited in *Esprit*, May 1958.)

## Long quarter of an hour

The chain of responsibility now extended from the men at the Palais Bourbon to the torturers of El Biar. France became totally involved in the Algerian war and hence in the growth of authoritarian rule within the Republican framework: the constant seizures of Left-wing journals, the blanket denials of torture allegations, the ministerial covering of the unilateral actions of the military, the suppression of investigation, the framing of trials, the creeping, guilty silence—the whole miserable history of suppression, evasion and brutality. As the society was re-shaped to the imperatives of racism and colonial war, it required only the hint of a possible change in policy in Paris to trigger the crisis situation which was to demonstrate the cancerous weakness of a liberal democracy. For two years France awaited Robert Lacoste's "Last Quarter of an Hour"; and when it came, so much had already been surrendered, that it marked the end not of the war but of the Republic itself.

The Fourth Republic had died long before the Assembly ratified its burial. It died in the lies of its politicians, in the ever-mounting contradictions between their deeds and their words. The republic died in the hearts of the French people, faced with the flagrant fictions and monstrous myths with which their leaders attempted to "cover" their successive betrayals. By May 13, 1958, the Assembly had virtually seceded from the Republic. In Algeria war was being extended to the Tunisian borderlands; in Paris the police were rioting; and between Paris and Algiers the lines were being drawn of the plot that was to overthrow the Republic. But none of these things seemed to affect the Assembly consumed in their ritual of cowardice, cover and capitulation. "What is a deputy?" asked a journalist early in May, "a frightened man."

From Suez—an adventure plotted by four ministers without reference to government or deputies—to Sakiet—when the sources of disaster could no longer even be located in the government, the public lies multiplied on a steeply mounting gradient. The Assembly died as it had lived: in a crescendo of myths and fictions that had by now reached deafening proportion. The army seized power in Algeria: the Assembly congratulated it on its patriotism and good sense. The cry *Vive De Gaulle!* launched to a crowd that was burning France's Prime Minister in effigy, proclaimed by orators denouncing the parliamentary system and threatening it with military overthrow instigated by a man who was at that moment escaping from house arrest in Paris: this cry was declared by the President of the Republic to be "not against the nation." The army sent troops to overthrow Republican power in Corsica; the Assembly replied by a unanimous vote of special power to its leader. As the network of conspiracy was revealed, spreading through the upper reaches of the military, the administration and the parties governmented arrested . . . the Biaggists. But then, at the last hour, the Assembly made its stand. The men who had sanctioned Sakiet and May 13, the men who had welcomed Salan and Massu—these men finally confronted an attack on the republic which they could not ignore: the Corsican

revolt. At last the great *journee* of the Fourth Republic had arrived. "Never," the orators declared, as they mounted the tribune, "Never could France, the France of Valmy and Verdun, the France of Rousseau and Victor Hugo, the France that had never bowed before tyranny, never could it surrender to the appalling *chantage* of the revolt in Corsica." They would not be content with words, they would act. Not, it is true, against the revolutionary authority at Ajaccio, for even this, they felt, was beyond their power—but against the man responsible, M. Arrighi. And so to the final farce: the Assembly of Dides and Tixier Vignancourt, of Morice and Soustelle, of Chaban-Delbas and Bidault, the Assembly which had cradled the plot against the Republic and provided half its personnel, solemnly declared that it could no longer countenance the presence of M. Arrighi. The dissolution of the Biaggists, most insignificant of the *factieux*, the expulsion of Arrighi, most petty of the plotters: this was the sum total of the Assembly's attempt to save the Fourth Republic. For if the real plotters could be patriots, then Communist votes could be anti-votes, the largest majority ever enjoyed by a Fourth Republic Prime Minister could be too precarious for the Republican government of the land to continue; the President and protector of the republic could threaten the Assembly with civil war if they did not get out of the way as quickly as possible; De Gaulle could show his determination to restore French *grandeur*, by accepting power from the torturers of Algeria, the bombers of Port Said and the plotters of Ajaccio, as he could show his loathing of the *systeme* by re-presenting its archetypal representatives—Pinay, Mollet, Lejeune—in the rogues gallery that was his first Cabinet of National Regeneration. France, it was rightly said, needed a strong government: she was given instead a strong man, a man whose overwhelming merit in the eyes of the Assembly was a refusal to utter a single word of policy before he had been entrusted with absolute power over the future of the Republic, lest that word splinter the elaborate structure of mystique and speculation so painfully built around his persona.

## "Tour de France"

As power slid from the nerveless hands of the politicians, the fate of the Republic came to depend entirely upon the action of the working class. In the crisis of the Republic the C.G.T. called a general strike. In Aubervilliers and Villejuif, in the shipyards of St. Nazaire and the docks of Marseilles, in all the small working-class communities where the primary lines of working-class solidarity still held, that call was followed. But in the large towns, in the big factories, in the new industrial centres it was generally ignored. At Renault, for twenty-five years the storm centre of Paris working-class militancy, only 15% of the workers obeyed the strike call.

"De Gaulle? He wants to take over from all those bastards. That's what they're pissing themselves about, but what the hell has that got to do with us?" (Report on Renault workers during the crisis, *L'Express*, June 5, 1958.)

Anti-parliamentarism and contempt for the politicians was not new to the French working-class movement. But the leaders of the Fourth Republic—and especially the parties of the Left—achieved something unique in modern French history: they alienated the French people, above all the working class, from identification or involvement with the defence of Republican institutions:

"From the 13th of May, the workers at Simca, Citroen and Renault brought into the factories more radio sets than during the Tour de France and went off into the corners of the factory to listen to the news from Paris and Algiers. What did they

do? Were they worried? Did they think of taking enthusiastically to the streets? No. they sat wondering who would win the *Maillot Jaune*. De Gaulle? Pflmlin? Massu? Nobody? *They awaited the result with curiosity*" (our italics). *L'Express*, May 30, 1958.

The Republic, they felt, was no longer about "them." They could see the crisis as yet another "spectacle," its chief actors as mere "personalities." Many factors were woven into this pattern of total withdrawal. The confused timetable of the *coup* made concerted action appear first premature, then useless. The workers were burdened with the bitter experience of successive defeat: "Once again we have been had," commented a Renault militant after the crisis—he had never really expected otherwise. The workers were asked to fight on confused positions; confronted with the nightmare visage of the Fourth Republic—its Mollets, its Pinays, its Bourges-Manoury—they preferred to stay off the streets. And they were separated, one from another, by divisions more bitter than anywhere else in Europe: only when it was too late did the Communist, Catholic and Socialist union federations combine their action in defence of the Republic. All these explanations, however, are finally inadequate. They understate the tragedy, the unique character, of May 1958. In February 1934 Socialist and Communist, despite a decade of mutual denunciation, combined to lead the people of Paris against a Fascist putsch, combined to save a Republican government as corrupt as any in the Fourth Republic. The workers' passivity in the 1958 crisis of the Republic has a special significance. It represented a total secession not only from the bourgeois leaders of the Fourth Republic, but also from "their" institutions, "their" trade unions, "their" party. And so the fundamental explanation must be sought in the deformation of the two working-class parties, above all in the essential proletarian Party, the Communist Party.

## Defence of the citadel

Any critique of the French Communist Party must start by recognizing the outstanding fact that it alone of the Republican parties stood firm against the Right Wing threat in Algiers and the Republican capitulation in Paris. *But this can only be a starting point.* For if the French working class had withdrawn from political engagement, it had withdrawn in the first instance from its Party. If French trade unionists did not respond to the call of their leaders in the late days of May, they were rejecting the political leadership of the C.G.T. The French workers seceded from the Republic *via* the Communist Party. The French C.P., in its actions and its *mots d'ordre*, in its programme and in the structure of its electorate, had come to embody more than anyone else the traditional values of the French Left. Anti-clericalism, internationalism, the commitment of the intellectuals, the militancy of the workers—the whole Jacobin tradition had been subsumed in the great Party colossus. During the post-war period, through all the Cold War pressures, it had remained *the* Party of the French working class, structured as its defensive citadel, and enjoying an electoral support which never fell below five million. Yet this Party, leader of anti-fascism in the days of the Tardieu-Domergue plot against the Republic, the Croix du Feu and the Camelots du Roi, vanguard of the Resistance, organized monolithically and on military lines precisely to meet days such as those of May 1958, proved powerless to influence in any way the direction of the crisis. This total collapse had not been foreseen because the strength of the Communist Party had been assessed in the number of its voters, and the Communist vote, despite the Twentieth Congress, despite Hungary, showed no marked

regression: in some of the by-elections preceding the crisis it had even increased' on its 1956 level. Yet the Party was totally run down in its *elan*, in its membership, in its moral and political quality; a mechanism from which the motor had been removed.

Stalinized Communism looks remarkably like a one-generation movement, unable after the first generation to renew itself in political dynamism or cadres. Formed in a period of working-class retreat it was to compensate, by its steel-like determination, its granite discipline, its total subordination of the individual militant to the Party monolith, for the weakness of the working-class movement. The Workers' State was encircled, the working class of every country under siege. Stalinism did not simply create a vanguard to lead the workers' army. It moulded the minority Communist elite for the defence of the citadel; it imbued it with a siege mentality to meet the bitterest of repressions, the most savage of tortures, to hold the most isolated of positions in the most unfavourable battles. The Party was to move with the rhythm of an army: it had to if it was to survive the perils of the campaign. And so its cadres, like those of the military, were deprived of all spontaneity, of all powers of initiative, of all means of participating in decision making.

## **The Party remains**

By the 1950s the French Communist Party had interposed between itself and the working class not only a vast bureaucratic apparatus, cantilevering out in all directions, removing it from contact with French reality, but also a generation of cadres and militants. The difference between the relative flexibility of the Italian Communist Party and the rigid *immobilisme* of the French measures a difference in cadre formation. The cadres of the Italian Party had been formed from the membership influx of 1944-7; the cadres of the French C.P. from the influx of 1934-6. The difference was not only one of years—important though that was in stiffening the French C.P.'s conservatism. The hard core militant of the French Communist Party had lived through the *Revolu-tion Manquee* of June 1936 and the collapse of the Popular Front in 1938; he had been steeled and corrupted in the bitter years of 1939-41; he had seen his Party change, in a period of six months, from the hero of the Resistance to the outlaw of French society; he lived through a second encirclement in which once again he was denounced as being outside the French community. In Italy the harshness of the 1947 change had been cushioned by the alliance and solidarity (even capitulation) of the majority socialists. In France the division between Communist and socialist was sealed in the blood of the November 1947 strikes, called as part of the tough Cominform line, repressed as part of the Cold War anti-Communist drive. Rapidly the defensive reflexes of 1928-35, 1939-41 reappeared. But now the militant had grown older, and as he grew older so he grew still more bitter. The mood of hate—hatred of the Americans, hatred of the bourgeois, hatred of the socialists, hatred of the Titoists—welled up until finally it overpowered all his other Communist emotions. When the staggering blow of the Twentieth Congress was followed so soon by the Hungarian repression, his horizons narrowed still further. He could no longer even attempt a world view; he could no longer try to fit the facts of his politics to some image and ideal of the Communist Society. All his certainties had been eroded: all that remained was The Party, looming ever more mightily in his political thinking. And now the Party was under a new threat. Now the enemy was not only the visible enemy—the *patron*, the G.L., the Nazi general, the socialist leader: now the enemy was within, questioning at Cell meetings,

circulating his *Etincelle*, his anonymous resolutions, or "quitting" to leave behind a legacy of bitterness and hate. Attacked on all sides, the Communist militant reacted much as did the French conservative to In do-China and Algeria: every stone of the structure so painfully built up must be defended.

## **Degeneration in ideals**

Through all this the Communist Party still retained the support of the French working class: its bitterness was their bitterness, its despair was their despair—only multiplied to the nth degree and passed through the distorting lens of Cominform policy. The working class still voted Communist: it was still the one great anti-capitalist party; it was still the Party of the Revolution, *their* revolution. But the quality of their support had changed. The Communist vote remained stable—but its membership had dropped from one million to under five hundred thousand. Communist policies still had mass appeal: but the sale of *l'Humanite* had shrunk from six hundred thousand to under one hundred thousand. As the number of militants and activists contracted, so the circuits between the Party and its supporters closed. The Party now moved within a triple *cordon sanitaire*, its electors divided from the nation, its militants from its supporters, its leadership from both. As the Party's campaigns were operated more and more by the militants alone, so it no longer bothered to feel the pulse of the working-class communities, its actions were no longer fettered by the need to persuade five million Frenchmen of the justness of the current political line.

As with the Party, so with the C.G.T. The united C.G.T. of 1945 had six million members, the Communist C.G.T. of 1958 under a million. It was still the majority union; it had more members than its two rivals combined; it obtained its majorities in the Works Council elections. But the French worker was alienated from "his" union as completely as he was alienated from "his" Party. Subject to the blacklisting of its militants, faced with the unrelenting hostility of the *patronat* which strove to exclude it from wage agreements, threatened by the competition of the Catholic and Socialist unions, the C.G.T. leaders in their turn fostered a siege mentality, organized their ranks to the pattern of a military formation. Every negotiation, every strike, every agreement, was part of a total defensive strategy. Spontaneous action, natural militancy were not enough in battle. They could even be dangerous. Often the C.G.T. leaders had to call off strikes with no substantial gain—perhaps to keep some working unity between the three trade union centres, perhaps because they did not feel strong enough to wage a strike alone. Often the Union could only afford the nagging strike: the *debrayage*, the twenty-four hour stoppage. The individual militant, the factory group might not understand the complex military strategy of which his demands, and these actions, were but a part. And since this might prove awkward to the leadership, the members were not consulted, their natural means of expression restricted. The worker was made a passive spectator of the negotiations which affected his hours, his conditions and his wages: he was not to question the positions adopted: and the strike order, if it came, *was* an order, an administrative instruction. Thus spontaneity and popular initiative were subordinated, in the unions as in the Party, to the efficient carrying through of the total operation.

Parallel to this structural deformation went the degeneration in policy and ideals. Again one must start from a recognition. The Communist Party alone of the Republican parties fought against the war in Indo-China. Alone and embattled it stood with the French workers in the black

late 'forties and early 'fifties, when the high Cold War combined with the employers' counter-offensive against the gains of the Liberation. Alone of the Parties it stood unanimously against the return of the men of Vichy and the rearmament of the Wehrmacht generals. In the end, whatever the hesitations of its policy, it *was* the only Party which never supported the *colons* in Algeria. But this affirmation is a starting-point, not a conclusion. For if the Communist Party fought it also betrayed. Its betrayal was not the betrayal of the French Socialist Party, abasing itself before the French bourgeoisie. It was a betrayal of a different order—no less profound for being less conscious and less obviously flagrant. Standard-bearer of the traditions of the Revolution and the principles of the Republic when everyone else was running for cover, it yet denuded them of moral quality and political responsibility. It opposed the war in Indo-China—but it had stayed in the government when that war was launched, as it had stayed through the massacres of Constantine and the massacres in Madagascar. It called for peace in Algeria—but in the spring of 1956, searching desperately for parliamentary unity with the socialists, it voted the special powers under which Mollet was to extend the Algerian war and fetter the opposition to that war. This is not to say that the Communist Party's anti-colonialism was fraudulent. But the Party had a higher reason, a supreme value to which all else could be trimmed and, if necessary, sacrificed: its one absolute was the Party itself. Its internationalism was narrowed to a class internationalism; and class internationalism was in turn

narrowed to the international solidarity of Communist Parties. If the Communist Party's opposition to the Indo-Chinese war had a fiercer quality than their stand on North Africa, it was because in the Viet Minh they could recognize comrades; in the Neo Destour of Tunisia, the Istiqlal of Morocco and the F.L.N. of Algeria, only bourgeois nationalist groupings. Principles which were so expendable could also be turned on their head: socialist internationalism was invoked to defend every Stalinist atrocity, every twist in the international Communist line. The Higher Realism of the Communist Party turned out to be the ultimate irrationality of the Fourth Republic. Emptied of their content, cut off from the informing, humanist spirit of socialism, Republican principles had lost their true reality. How could the working class fight for what they no longer understood? The leaders of the Left had drawn heavily upon the moral reserves of the French working class. They squandered and manipulated its generous internationalism, the Socialists to force through German rearmament, the Communists to justify Budapest. The parties of the Fourth Republic abused and suffocated every political emotion, every moral commitment upon which French democracy had been built until in the end there was only apathy. Apathy and nationalism. If in the closing days of the Fourth Republic the French workers remained stubbornly demobilized in face of the Gaullist threat, it is not only to the regime of the French Right that we must look in assessing the responsibilities.