

FRANCE'S SURRENDER AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION

"PERTINAX"

THE surrender of France, which took place on the 22nd and the 23rd of June, when the armistice with Germany and Italy was signed, was much more serious in its consequences than military defeat itself. After all, as long as England fights, the military defeat and its consequences can be made good; but the moral surrender meant that the burden of our British friends was to prove much more onerous and much more terrible, that the war might be lost. Our allies had a right to rely upon the cooperation of the French fleet and oversea empire. The most that they could hope, from the end of June onward, was that the French fleet and bases in Africa and Syria would not be used against them. The developments to-day, on the Libyan Egyptian confines, show what the French, even without any support from their metropolitan territory, would have been able to achieve in the struggle against Italy.

The moral surrender of France—the separate armistices—did not imply only that the British would have to fight much harder, but, in addition, that the men who spoke on behalf of France, entirely broke with the tradition of national liberty which can be traced back to the French kings of the 10th century and also with all the principles of the French Revolution, in short, that, for the future, they cast their lot with the totalitarian powers.

Can it be said that these men expressed and still express the will of the French people? Last June, the French population was stunned: it would have been futile to ascertain what it felt. On the 16th of June, my wife still lingered in our house in Limousin: she was surprised to see how the people of the village failed to see the true state of affairs. Suddenly in church, the priest said, quoting from the Scriptures: "Lord, save us or we will perish". The whole congregation burst into tears. Everyone was vacant minded and had no opinion to express. But after a few weeks, many began to realize what had been done and, surely, they did not approve. To-day, we are fully informed. What took place on the 22nd of June would not have occurred at all but for a coup d'état carried out by Mr.

Laval. France had been rent asunder for about four or five years: once more, the spiritual posterity of the men of 1789 was assailed by counter-revolutionaries, who, in the past, had always failed in their attempts to pull down the Republic but, this time, could avail themselves of the unique opportunity offered by an unprecedented military disaster.

At the origin of that movement, we find Marechal Pétain and General Weygand with Paul Baudoin in the background—Paul Baudoin raised to office by Paul Reynaud. They started the ball rolling. On the 12th, 13th and 14th of June, they expressed the opinion, speaking as military experts, of course, that resistance could not be pushed further, that England was done for, that we could not expect that she would be able to withstand the impending Nazi onslaught and that no useful purpose could be served through transferring to North Africa, the seat of the Government. Taking that line, they were swayed by the following ideas:

(1) Pétain and Weygand believed that there were a sort of brotherhood of generals transcending all governments. Just as a knight of old expected to find honor and mercy at the hands of his enemy, so they would find an honorable and merciful peace with Germany. Marechal Foch, let it be said, had been misled by a sentimentality of that kind, in 1918, when he spared Hindenburg and Ludendorf the invasion of German territory and, about the armistice asked for by the Germans, advised Clémenceau accordingly.

(2) These two military leaders failed to understand that the Nazi rulers of 1940 aimed at an armistice and at a peace very different from those with which the Hohenzollern of 1871 had been satisfied. They probably thought that two or three provinces would be lost and that the rest of metropolitan France would be left alone to reconstruct and recover. They did not understand that Nazi Germany was bent upon the destruction of the French nation.

(3) They imagined that, through trading the fleet and the empire clear from all cooperation with England, they would secure better terms. It did not dawn upon them that, by adding to the physical power of the victor, they unavoidably rendered him all the more ruthless.

(4) They had the preservation of social order in mind. They stated repeatedly that the French army ought not to fight to the point where it would fall into fragments and become unable to forestall or crush a new "*Commune*". Arguments

of that description, clearly, ought not to have impressed the cabinet: they ought not to have affected, in any way, the drawing up of the military balance sheet. They were irrelevant.

(5) Pétain and Weygand were certainly impressed by the cry of the average man in central and southern France: "Stop the German advance by all means!" But ought a panicky impulse ever to interfere with the calculations of statesmanship?

Marshal Pétain and General Weygand have thus contributed to turning the scales. Did their past record forebode their attitude in the tragic juncture of last June? Who are they?

Pétain was one of the great military figures of the last war and a very sympathetic one. He was modest and did not meddle with politicians. He attracted the attention of the Minister of War, Painlevé, who entrusted to him the supreme command of the French army in 1917. He was a great executive, carrying out with unusual precision the orders of Joffre and then of Nivelle. The offensive operations he conducted never were as costly in human life as those planned by others. And his most conspicuous service to France was, in 1917, to subdue mutineers and to reestablish discipline in the French army sorely tried in the wild assault of the month of April. Jules Cambon used to compare Marshal Pétain with Marechal de Castellane who, out of the Napoleonic rout of 1815, reconstructed the French army. Pétain was loved by rank and file. But had he in him what makes a supreme leader? M. Poincaré did not think so and Marshal Foch as well as General Weygand concurred with him.

In March, 1918, there was no supreme commander of the Allied forces. The Germans attacked on March 21 at the junction of the English and French lines. General Pétain had massed his reserves behind the Champagne front since he was convinced that the blow would be struck there. He refused to move them. He stuck to his theory that the main German attack would be directed on Paris. The orders he issued to his army commanders on March 24th have been published. They insist that it is of supreme interest to protect Paris and that the liaison with the British army must be treated as a secondary consideration. In brief, he was ready to put up with the separation of the French and the British armies. Haig had to instruct his troops to retire, in case of need, toward the Channel ports. The British Cabinet was terrified. Lord Milner was sent in haste to France: on the request he made directly to Clemenceau, Foch was appointed Generalissimo of the allied forces.

I have heard Foch declare more than once that in September 1918 he would have postponed until the spring of 1919 the triumphant offensive then in progress, had he allowed himself to be moved by the views of Marshal Pétain. In war-time and, afterwards, in peace-time, the present "head of the French state" has been a pessimistic soldier.

When he went to Warsaw in 1935 to attend the funeral of Pilsudski, the other members of the French delegation wondered why he took every opportunity to make friendly overtures to Marshal Goering. They advised him to let the Germans make the first move, but he paid no attention to such warnings. Even last winter, in the midst of the war, as French ambassador in Madrid, he did not hesitate, once or twice, to go to his German colleague and shake hands with him. His tenure of the Ministry of War, in 1934, put in strong relief his association with the right. General Weygand is reported to have said that it had dawned upon Pétain at that time, that he might become, some day, the Hindenburg of France. Weygand was then engaged in a lengthy controversy with him about the extension of the military service to two years which he would not concede. When Pétain left the Ministry of War in November 1934, he designated as his successor the most defeatist general in the country, General Maurin, who did more than anyone to prevent Gamelin from entering the Saar on the 7th of March 1936, a fateful deed. Early in 1938, Pétain was sent to Madrid as ambassador. He was delighted with the appointment but he never made his business to submit to Franco's Government the numerous counterclaims of the Paris Cabinet. He maintained that he had accepted to go to Spain so as to create a moral atmosphere, which he tried to do through conceding everything to the Spanish nationalists. As to the concrete problems on the agenda, he deliberately ignored them and he didn't even tolerate that the experienced diplomat who assisted him as councillor of embassy should handle them. He asked for the recall of that official and pressed M. Daladier not to send another man. Oddly enough, Edouard Herriot paved the way for the accession of Marshal Pétain to ministerial office. Herriot had been offered by Daladier, in January 1940, the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and he was afraid lest public opinion should run against him if Italy took pretext of his appointment to join Germany in the war. He thought that Pétain, if included in the Cabinet as Minister of State would afford him protection. The "com-

binazione" did not come to anything. But Pétain had been put in the running for political preferment.

Now, as to Weygand. A level-headed man, a well balanced mind, much admired by Foch as chief of staff. However, he never was in personal command of troops in the field save, for a few days, in the Russo-Polish war of 1920. He has shared to the full in the defensive doctrine of the French general staff which disastrously foundered on the rock, last May. However, let us say that he was heard to say in 1934, a few months before retiring, that his "successor would have to deal with the problem of the 'spearhead'" of the army which Gamelin never tackled. A fanatical partisan in politics. He has a sort of inferiority complex caused by the mystery surrounding his birth. He is deeply steeped in social prejudices of every description. Perhaps it was his misfortune to be elected to the French Academy, a hotbed of fascism. His violently expressed hatred of democracy and parliamentary government doubtless has something to do with his attitude toward England which stands in Europe for representative institutions. He was the first to recommend a military alliance with Russia in 1932-33. But he coldly denied that he should have anything to do with the attempt to enlist Russia's cooperation in 1934-35 when Laval who signed the agreement of May 2nd, 1935, roused public opinion against it.

Pétain, Weygand, Darlan and Baudoin: in the first fortnight of June, these four men, by their words and deeds, gave the impetus to the policy which was to culminate in the separate armistices. But, by their own exertions, they would not have succeeded in pushing that policy so far. They shifted the balance against Reynaud's official policy and Churchill's proposal for the creation of a Franco-British commonwealth. Nevertheless, they would have been defeated in their purpose if Laval had not been behind the scene. The counter-revolution was carried out by that politician. In the town hall at Bordeaux, with the help of the Mayor and Deputy Marquet, one of those socialists of hitlerian leanings, he managed to gather around him a certain number of those parliamentarians who, in preceding years, had been always very lenient toward the totalitarian states. Thus was set up under Laval's guidance a sort of committee, which sat permanently and watched events. On the 21st of June, those men visited M. Lebrun as a body with Laval as head of the so-called delegation. Lebrun had declared three days before, that he would take the French Government to Northern Africa and Marshal Pétain had failed to deter him from leaving metro-

politan territory. Laval, in violent tones, assailed the President of the Republic: "Resign or remain". Lebrun wobbled and wavered under that hardly veiled threat. His hands were forced: he ran after the departing Laval and gave in. On the very same evening Laval was appointed Secretary of State. He had won. His program took shape: surrender and counter-revolution.

From the 21st of June and onward, Laval has been the real master of the Cabinet. His hand can be detected in the setting up of the new regime—the dictatorship. Under the stress of the circumstances a blank cheque was exacted from the national assembly, the constitutional law of the 10th of July. It enables the Government of the République, "*under the authority and signature of Marechal Pétain*", to promulgate one or several acts embodying the new Constitution of the French State. Within forty hours the lachrymose Lebrun was gone and the Presidency of the Republic had been suppressed. All the conceivable powers, executive and legislative, were vested in Pétain. But Laval, simultaneously, was speedily promoted Vice-President, Council and successor designate to Pétain. Trained as a parliamentary wirepuller (and, as such, nobody ever surpassed him), he has an ingrained taste for omnipotence. He may turn out to be a French Stalin, in the shadow of the great old soldier. A succession of decrees have been promulgated under his direct inspiration. They all aim at getting rid of every possible opponent or rival of his: creation of a supreme court of justice, cancellation of citizenships, a measure hitherto unknown in French law, etc. And let us not forget the trick played upon the former ministers who, on the 20th of June, had embarked on S. S. Massiglia in the honest belief the Government was about to be transferred to North Africa and with governmental approval.

Laval could not, one single minute, entertain the illusion that the British Government would put up with the position taken up by the new government concerning the fleet, the oversea empire and with its claim to be treated as a full fledged neutral, particularly as regards the blockade. From the outset, he must have foreseen that clashes would not be avoided—the clashes which occurred at Mers-el-Kebir at the beginning of July and at Dakar at the end of September. He does not conceal—in conversation, he cannot even restrain his passionate feelings—that he wishes German arms to triumph quickly. But for Marshal Pétain, he would have declared war on England

in the days after Mers-el-Kebir. Left to himself, he would stake everything on German victory. Moreover, the armistice treaties were built on the assumption that the war would not last long. The war, since it bids fair to continue indefinitely, crushes the French population and proves destructive of whatever authority the Vichy government may possess: the country cut in two very unequal parts, so watertight that even official correspondence from the occupied to the unoccupied zone is allowed only within the narrowest limits; 20 letters a day for each ministerial department, each limited to two pages; a daily charge of 4 hundred million francs for the upkeep of German troops, etc. For three months, Laval has tried to seek relief in a supplementary agreement with Germany whereby France would formally adhere to the three powers pact of the 27th September, 1940, and rank as Germany's inferior partner. But, hitherto, he has not been able to deliver the goods. He cannot carry his countrymen with him.

Thus, let us now return to the question: are the French people in accord with the present German-dominated government in France? Have they endorsed the surrender and the counter-revolution? I have not heard of any competent observer who dares answer in the affirmative. The whole trend of French history runs against Laval's dictatorship. The hardships and privations endured by the masses would suffice to discredit the ludicrous reform of French economy upon which government spokesmen expatiate: the transformation of France into a rural community under some form of political "patriarchate". As the outcome of that system, France would dwindle to 20 to 25 million inhabitants after two or three generations. Such a plan, of course, perfectly fits in with the Nazi purpose explained in "Mein Kampf": to eliminate France as a military and, therefore, as an industrial competitor. The French cannot be expected to agree at the bottom of their heart, whatever control of public opinion is forced upon them, to such a drastic curtailment of the national body and of the national soul.

And what about the motto of "national regeneration"? Can national regeneration be achieved on such a program and with the dregs of the old régime in high places? Not only Laval, but a whole sequel: Montigny Bonnet, Brinon, Scapini, Menétrier, a former "cagouillard" now installed in an important police function and so many others. After all, the "fascist" and the "Nazi" movements of regeneration arose from a latent longing of the Italian and German peoples for more wealth,

for larger frontiers and continental domination, rekindled by new men endowed with the magnetic gift. How would it be expected that men whose past is only too well known, should succeed in building up a despotism on the basis of complete resignation to heart rending sacrifices and unreserved compliance with the worst?

Marshal Pétain, it is true, must not be confused with Laval and Laval's retinue. Most Frenchmen credit him with a sincere patriotism, with the wish to do everything possible to improve their lot. Hence the moving scenes which unrolled themselves in Toulouse, Lyon, Marseilles when he was shown to the crowd claspng the tricolors to his breast. But, at the same time, Laval's unpopularity is on the increase. In other terms, the good intentions of the "patriarch" are praised while the policy actually carried out in his behalf does not evoke anything but repulsion. And let us not forget that the Marshal himself is closely connected with the old ideology of counter-revolution. As early as May 1935, he was known to be in general agreement with Laval about the necessity of having the Republic replaced by an authoritarian form of government.

A friend of mine recently visited several "prefects" and sought enlightenment from them about the feeling of the average man. In all cases, the answer was quite unequivocal: ninety per cent of all Frenchmen do not perceive any hope of salvation except in British victory.