

## FRENCH DISSIDENTS

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*Since our last article on the French situation (March 1943), which carried the story up to the assassination of Darlan on Christmas Eve 1942, the French dissident movement has been drawn completely into the vortex of power politics. Hence the contradictions existing among various factions of the dissidents have been multiplied by the intrigues of Washington, London, and Moscow. The alternating news about alleged reconciliations and fresh quarrels between the dissident leaders and the coming and going of their supporters finally became so confused that most people abandoned the effort of keeping up with events. On the basis of all material available here, our French collaborator has now prepared an analysis of the developments in the dissident camp for the past twelve months.—K.M.*

### DARLAN'S LAST WILL

**S**HORTLY before he was assassinated, Darlan made a statement over the radio which has since become known as his "last will" and in which he explained his own position. The Admiral took great pains to point out that he was not a rebel opposed to Marshal Pétain but was acting on the Marshal's behalf. He claimed that Marshal Pétain had become a prisoner of the Germans when they marched into unoccupied France following the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa, and he called himself "the trustee of the legal powers of France." Darlan said: "We do not intend to form a government in North Africa. I simply represent the interests of France in North Africa in the name of the Marshal who is a prisoner of the Germans."

To the French mind the question of legality has always been important. Therefore it might have been of the utmost consequence for the further course of events if Darlan's theory had been generally accepted. Two facts, however, interfered with his plan. In the first place, Marshal Pétain himself, instead of declaring himself a prisoner of the Germans, clearly disavowed the Admiral on November 14, 1942, that is, as soon as the latter's treason became certain, and thus denuded Darlan of every pretence of acting in his name. In the second place, the Allies were not in agreement

in their attitude toward Darlan. While Washington showed willingness to cooperate with him, England had its own pretender to the leadership of the French dissident forces in the person of General Charles de Gaulle, while in Moscow's eyes Darlan remained a "Fascist."

On December 24, 1942, the problem of Darlan was eliminated by his assassination; but the conflicts between the French dissidents and the Allies remained. The first to take up where Darlan had been interrupted was General Henri Honoré Giraud. (Giraud was at this moment in North Africa after breaking his pledged word to the Germans and to the Marshal, while de Gaulle was still in London.) For Giraud there was no longer any possibility of pretending that he possessed the legality which Darlan had still claimed for himself. But, as a general, Giraud did not care much about politics. One of his first actions was the transformation of Darlan's "Empire Council" into a simple "War Committee," also in Algiers. He believed that it was enough to have a common aim—that of fighting against the Axis—to unite all dissident forces.

But there were many political controversies of a domestic nature to be taken care of. In North Africa alone—not to mention the other French possessions under dissident rule—there are at least three clear divisions among the population: French, Arabs, and Jews.

In addition there were the difficulties arising from the presence of large foreign armies and from the scarcity of food and supplies. It seems that General Giraud hoped to overcome these difficulties and to maintain order simply by continuing to employ the laws of Vichy and the men whom the Marshal had entrusted with the administration of North Africa—General Noguès in Morocco and Governor General Boisson in French West Africa. M. Peyrouton he made Governor General of Algeria and a member of the War Committee.

#### THE MEN BEHIND GIRAUD

In 1936 Abel Peyrouton was Resident General of Morocco. As he was frequently accused of having authoritarian and Fascist inclinations, Blum's Popular Front Cabinet transferred him in September 1936 to the post of French Ambassador to Argentina, replacing him in Morocco by General Noguès.

After the collapse of France the Marshal recalled him from Buenos Aires and made him Vice-Minister, later Minister, of Internal Affairs. But it seems that from the start Peyrouton was opposed to the Marshal's policy of collaboration with Germany. He was a bitter enemy of Laval and responsible for the latter's dismissal on December 14, 1941. Upon Laval's return to power he resigned and returned to Buenos Aires. It was only after the assassination of Darlan that Peyrouton went to North Africa.

Apart from Peyrouton and his military colleagues, the men behind Giraud were mainly leading capitalists. Among them we have heard the names of René Mayer (nephew of the Rothschilds of Paris, representative of Jewish high finance, and agent of the Lazard banking group) and Lemaigre-Dubreuil, who some years earlier had headed the French Employers' Organization. Another important political group in France linked with the dissidents consists of men close to Colonel de la Roche's "Social Party." For some time it seemed as if they were supporting Marshal Pétain; but when they realized that the Marshal was sincere in his policy

of collaboration, and particularly after Laval's return to power and the Darlan affair of November 1942, they turned more and more in favor of the dissidents.

#### RELUCTANT HANDSHAKE

The most important inner-political question, which Giraud could not ignore in the long run, was the clarification of his relations with General de Gaulle, who had headed most of the dissidents before Darlan and Giraud had appeared in North Africa. From the start a sharp conflict existed between Giraud and de Gaulle. The War Committee itself was composed almost entirely of men who had not long ago pledged allegiance to Marshal Pétain and more or less approved the domestic policy of the Marshal's national revolution. Quite apart from personal ambition and enmity, this fact alone made it impossible for de Gaulle to submit himself to the War Committee, as he had always most severely criticized not only the Marshal's collaboration with Germany but also his internal policy. The efforts of the American Commander in Chief, General Dwight Eisenhower, to reconcile all French dissidents faced great difficulties. Even the theatrical handshake of Giraud and de Gaulle during the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 did not settle the question.

As time went on, the political problems in the dissident camp became more pressing and could no longer be overlooked. For the sake of unity, General Giraud, who wished to concentrate his energies on military questions, began to compromise here and there with de Gaulle. He abandoned some of Vichy's authoritarian laws, such as the laws about the Jews, and he freed political prisoners—former Communist deputies, Red Spaniards, and various anti-Vichy elements. Finally, on June 3, 1943, he merged his War Committee with de Gaulle's organization "Fighting France" into the "Committee of National Liberation." With every concession he made, Giraud opened the gate of North Africa a little wider to de Gaulle and his followers; yet the ten-

sion between the two leaders did not diminish.

#### CHARLES DE GAULLE

From the "Free French" via "Fighting France" to the "Committee of National Liberation"; from the desire to continue the war against Germany at the side of England via mercenary service to England to the recent submission to Moscow—can we find some explanation for these ceaseless changes in the policy of de Gaulle?

If the "Free French" had fought on the battlefield against the Germans, anyone would have considered the sacrifice of their lives a guarantee of their sincerity, no matter what he may have thought about the political views of their leaders. But the fight against the Germans hardly ever materialized. From the days of Oran and Dakar (July and September 1940), de Gaulle's "Free French" fought almost exclusively against other Frenchmen and for the benefit of England. To be sure, England had promised de Gaulle the restoration of France and her colonial empire after the end of the war; but after the Atlantic Charter and the conferences of Casablanca, Moscow, and Teheran, not much has been left of this promise. The development has gone far beyond those early conversations between Churchill and de Gaulle in 1940, and it is a long time since anybody on the Anglo-American side mentioned the restoration of the French Empire.

When, under the constant pressure of General Eisenhower and public opinion in America and England, Giraud and de Gaulle finally reached some semblance of co-operation, they both still realized that, as far as the world was concerned, they did not represent much more than their own bands of followers. This is why they have tried incessantly to obtain the status of a recognized government.

#### NO RECOGNITION

The question of recognition of the Committee of National Liberation has been discussed in the newspapers over

and over again. Finally, on August 27, 1943, Great Britain, the United States, and the USSR defined their attitudes toward the Committee of National Liberation in Algiers—each in its own way.

The British note states that it regards the Committee as an institution "which is able to safeguard the direction of French war efforts within the framework of inter-Allied co-operation." Thus, in the eyes of the British, the Committee is not an organ lawfully representing France, nor an exile government, but merely an instrument of the Allied war effort. To make this quite clear, the note declares that there can be no question of an exchange of diplomatic representatives between the Committee and the British Government. M. Vienot, once a member of a Blum cabinet, whom the Committee had sent to London, is neither an ambassador nor a minister but merely an agent; while the British representative in Algiers MacMillan bore the title of "Minister Resident," the customary title for the representative of a great power in a state without sovereignty, until he was replaced by Duff-Cooper on November 22. This attitude of London places the Committee of National Liberation on a lower level than Egypt who, at least outwardly, is recognized as sovereign by London.

Just as unsatisfactory is the wording of Washington's note, which reads:

The Government of the United States takes note with sympathy of the desire of the Committee to be regarded as the body qualified to ensure the administration and defense of French interests. The extent to which it may be possible to give effect to this desire must, however, be reserved for consideration in each case as it arises.

On these understandings, the Government of the United States recognizes the French Committee of National Liberation as administering those French overseas territories which acknowledge its authority. This statement does not constitute a recognition of a government of France or of the French empire by the Government of the United States.

Thus, as far as the governments of London and Washington are concerned, the Committee does not represent the French nation—in contrast to their attitude toward the refugee governments of Poland, Norway, and others—but is

merely a body with very limited administrative functions.

The Anglo-Americans' attitude is easy to understand. They want North Africa as a base for their war against Europe. They need its man power, ports, grain, phosphates, ore, railways, and they wish to keep their hands completely free in order to deal with the French colonial empire at their own will and without being bothered by any considerations for a French governmental body.

#### THE SOVIETS GO THEIR OWN WAY

The Soviet note of August 27 is quite different. It reads in full :

The Government of the Soviet Union, after becoming acquainted with the declaration of the French Committee of National Liberation, has decided to recognize the French Committee of National Liberation as the representative of the state interests of the French Republic and as the leader of all French patriots who fight against Hitler tyranny and to exchange representatives with full powers.

Moscow has very cleverly used the situation for its own purposes. While London and Washington have refused recognition, Moscow, in extending full recognition, has made up for its lack of military power in North Africa by firm diplomatic ties with Algiers. The Soviets immediately dispatched Bogomolov to Algiers as an ambassador. This choice is significant. Prior to his appointment to Algiers, Bogomolov was Soviet Ambassador to the refugee governments of Greece, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia in London. By transferring him to Algiers without appointing a successor in London, Moscow has clearly shown that it has far higher regard for Algiers than for the London-supported refugee governments, exactly the opposite attitude to that of Great Britain. We can be sure that the Soviet Union will utilize its diplomatic relationship with Algiers to the best advantage. Before the end of August, sixty Soviet "commercial representatives" arrived in Algiers to be attached to various Soviet trade commissions.

#### THE LEBANON REVOLTS

The nonrecognition of the Committee of National Liberation by the Anglo-

Americans has had many sad consequences for that body. Time and again the Committee has complained that it was not invited to participate in any of the important Allied conferences—as, for instance, those in Moscow, Cairo, and Teheran—that it has no seat in the Allied Advisory Council in London, and that it was not allowed to participate in the armistice negotiations with Badoglio, although in all these cases French interests were affected.

In November 1943, M. Helleu who, in the name of the Committee of National Liberation, was High Commissioner for the Republic of Lebanon, arrested the President as well as the Chief of Government of Lebanon, because they had proclaimed the independence of their state and the abolition of the French mandate. This step of the Lebanese statesmen was the result of promises of liberation and independence for the Lebanon which the dissidents had made when they conquered the Lebanon and Syria from the Vichy authorities. A revolution broke out in the Lebanon. Even General Catroux (de Gaullist predecessor of Helleu and former de Gaullist Governor General of French Indo-China, a close friend of the English, and probably a better diplomat than most other ex-generals among the dissidents) was unable to calm the Lebanon when he was sent there. Although the Committee of National Liberation had publicly claimed that Helleu had only obeyed its orders, Catroux was unable to find any solution to the conflict except by discarding Helleu and releasing the Lebanese leaders.

This case again showed the importance of legality. The Committee of National Liberation has no claims on Syria and the Lebanon because it does not represent France, to whom these states were given as mandates by the League of Nations. The British cleverly turned this to their own advantage by taking the side of the Syrians and Lebanese, thus harming French prestige in the Near East and replacing French power by their own.

## THE LEGALITY OF VICHY

In contrast to the dissidents, the Government at Vichy is a government both in name and in fact. Laval in particular has always been aware of the importance of legality and has strictly adhered to it, even when this was most inconvenient. When on July 10, 1940, Laval obtained legal powers for the Marshal from the National Assembly, almost all the members of the assembly were sons of the Third Republic. Being even at that moment traditionally unwilling to yield their rights to one man, they put various restrictions on his powers. To observe these restrictions scrupulously and to keep the promises made, even those made by former French governments, has been the policy of the Marshal and of Laval in order not to give their enemies any justified grounds for attacking the legality of their government.

This is the reason why the Government has remained in Vichy instead of returning to Paris, thereby keeping intact the status resulting from the Armistice of June 1940. (The part of France not occupied before November 1942 is still considered legally unoccupied territory, as the entry of German troops after the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa was not an "occupation" but an action for the defense of the coast of southern France.)

This is the reason why the French Fleet scuttled itself at Toulon in November 1942. (The Government thereby combined its obligation resulting from the Armistice, i.e., not to give the Navy to the British, and its pledge to the British Government made in June 1940, i.e., not to hand the fleet over to the Germans.)

This is, finally, one of the reasons why no peace has been signed between the Vichy Government and Germany. (The previous French Government had promised its ally England not to conclude a separate peace.)

As a result of this careful policy, Laval's government has a clear legal basis. Even today, with German troops in all parts of France and with large numbers of young Frenchmen in Germany as workers

or prisoners of war, the Allies still fear the Vichy Government, as it is the only legal government for forty million Frenchmen. Allied radios are trying their utmost to incite the French against this Government. They warn them that French towns and industrial plants will be destroyed if the French people do not rise against the Germans; and day after day Allied bombs fall on French territory, killing and wounding thousands of French civilians.

## FROM ROYALISM TO BOLSHEVISM

How different is the situation of de Gaulle. He has broken with all principles of law and order. He has lost his citizenship. He is in the pay of the British. (Even though the money comes from the riches which the Allies have taken from the French, de Gaulle must obey the orders of those who control it.) If one of his followers does something which displeases the British or Americans, de Gaulle is forced to disavow him. This happened, for example, in the case of Helleu in the revolt of the Lebanon.

The absence of recognition, his fight with Giraud, and the necessity of maintaining his position against the swarms of politicians whom defeat had thrown out of France and who do not wish to be forgotten—all this has forced de Gaulle to look for any support he might be able to find. In order to avoid complete dependence on Britain, to get rid of American-supported Giraud and the ex-Vichy politicians, and to win new supporters for himself, de Gaulle threw himself into the arms of the Reds. The law of September 1, 1939, banning the Communist Party and all communist political organizations from French territory, was revoked on June 25, 1943. Twenty-six Communist deputies were released from prison. A large number of Communist organizations were permitted, such as the Communist Party, the Communist Fighting League, the Union of Syndicates, the Committee of Socialist Action, the League for Human Rights, the Society for French-Soviet Rapprochement, etc. Communist in-

fluence has risen enormously. On November 1, Communist demonstrators in Algiers demanded the proclamation of an Algerian Soviet Republic.

The road of de Gaulle is one more proof that there is no longer any intermediate solution for Europe and that the choice is only between a German victory or a Bolshevist Europe.

#### ECLIPSE OF GIRAUD

At the same time de Gaulle has forced many of Giraud's partisans—such as Peyrouton and Noguès—out of office. The result is that there is now nobody left in North Africa willing or able to fight the Bolshevist influence. All new vacancies provide opportunities for de Gaulle to reward his henchmen and to strengthen his prestige among them by making colonels into generals and small unknown officials into governors general.

All this has strengthened the inner-political position of de Gaulle to such an extent that Giraud has been increasingly eclipsed. In the last days of July, the dualism in the leadership of the Committee of National Liberation came to an end, when it was agreed that de Gaulle was henceforth to take care of all political questions, while the domain of Giraud was to be limited to the command of the military formations of the dissidents. This, however, led to new conflicts which reached their climax during the occupation of Corsica. Giraud, claiming supreme command of the troops, sent some dissident formations to the island without asking de Gaulle for permission, the latter only learning about this action through the British radio. Toward the end of September the new post of "Defense Commissioner" was created and given to General Le Gentilhomme, who thus became Giraud's superior. And a month later, on October 26, Giraud's powers were further curtailed when his military authority was limited to Corsica and the ports of Algiers, Bône, and Bizerta, the rest being placed under Le Gentilhomme.

#### CARICATURE OF A PARLIAMENT

Parallel to the gradual elimination of Giraud, the originally authoritarian regime of Darlan and Giraud had to be replaced for the sake of appearances. A "Provisional Advisory Assembly" was established by the end of September, at first with twenty members, viz., 5 Socialists, 5 Radical Socialists, 3 Communists, and 7 Centrists, which latter include the rightists. Later this number was increased until the Assembly became a miniature caricature of the old French Chamber of Deputies. Needless to say, the Assembly has little actual power, as all important decisions are made by the Anglo-American occupation authorities.

To characterize the type of men prominent in Algiers we shall name a few:

Mendès-France was a former Under-secretary of State for the Treasury in the second Blum Cabinet. With his own funds safely in Egyptian pounds in Alexandria, he was responsible in 1937 for the prohibition of transferring funds abroad and worked for the devaluation of the franc. In May 1941 he was condemned to six years' imprisonment for desertion, as he had left France in July 1940 while still a soldier. Both he, who is a Commissioner of Finance in the Committee of National Liberation, and M. Diethelm, Commissioner for Stores and Supplies, are Jewish.

Pierre Cot was Minister of Aviation in various French cabinets, especially those of Daladier. After the collapse of France he was accused of having neglected the preparation of her national defense. Having fled from France, he lectured at Harvard University. His pro-Soviet inclinations are of long standing.

André Marty has been known for many decades as a radical Communist leader in France. He made a notorious name for himself during the Spanish Civil War. The leading Communist in Algiers, he is one of the most important men there. He is loud in demanding the arrest of Giraud, whom he considers a Fascist. Another Communist is in charge of the "Office of Purification" and will become

very important in this position as soon as the trials start which have been announced for Peyrouton, Boisson, Noguès, Flandin, and other prominent men.

Needless to say, the Communists are not interested in helping de Gaulle. They are cleverly exploiting the situation in North Africa and the prevailing mental confusion among the French people to prepare their way to power. They are trying to make use of the discontent of the Arabs by proposing the creation of a free state or something similar, and of the Jews by spreading Communist ideas among them and by scaring them with the consequences of an Axis victory.

Will they also be able to win the French? This should be more difficult. The dissidents' situation is almost a repetition of that under the Popular Front regime. Even if we agree with Marshal Pétain that the French people have a short memory, we cannot but hope that they still remember the reasons for the collapse of 1940.

France has recently been told by Prime Minister Smuts of South Africa what she has to expect from her former ally England. On November 25, 1943, while taking Churchill's place in London during the latter's absence, Smuts declared:

"We may talk of France as a great power, but talking will not help her much. France has gone and will be gone in our day and perhaps for many a day."

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All these divergencies of opinion and this confusion of mind show that the French are still unable to achieve the moral and political unity so necessary

for the rebirth of France. But we should not base our conclusions as to France's future only on the facts mentioned in this article and to be found in the dissidents' camp. There are four other facts of which the world hears little and which in the end are likely to be of more consequence:

(1) The living and working of hundreds of thousands of French laborers in Germany for three-and-a-half years. This has given them and the Germans an opportunity to get to know and understand each other better than ever before.

(2) The mistakes made by the British and their American allies. They were frequently misled by their dissident advisers, who were motivated primarily by hatred for Germany and the new regime in France and who only thought of what they themselves had lost. But hatred is a bad adviser, and a strong anti-British feeling is growing among those who have had to pay for England's policy.

(3) The contrast between the actions of Germany who, for example, allowed the French to reoccupy Savoy and Nice after the surrender of Badoglio, and the Anglo-American grabbing of the French colonial empire.

(4) The fact that almost four years of dissidence have led to nothing better than to the return of those men and ideas that failed to settle the problems arising after the Great War and to whom few Frenchmen would wish to entrust their destiny again.

### *Once bitten . . .*

Danton, the overthrown leader of the French Revolution, had been condemned to death and was being taken to the guillotine in a tumbrel. With a bitter smile he turned away from the screaming mob and said to his companion Chabot:

"One thing I'm sure of: if there ever should be a revolution in heaven, we'll keep out of it!"