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THE FALL OF FRANCE, 1933-1939

A Research Paper

Presented to
the Graduate Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in History

by
Woodrow Wilson Chapman, Jr.

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Woodrow Wilson Chapman, Jr. entitled "The Fall of France, 1933-1939." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

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Major Professor

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS FACING FRANCE BEFORE 1933

"I maintain that this treaty, like all treaties, is and can only be a prolongation of war activities until complete fulfillment" wrote George Clemenceau in 1921 about the Versailles settlement.¹ France had just finished a war with Germany that had shattered the country. Young Frenchmen were rare compared to the pre-war years, and the French farmer had witnessed the destruction of his property. The hatred that France held for Germany was obvious, and, in 1925, Ramsay MacDonald of England warned Raymond Poincaré that Britain did not approve of France's actions. "The people in this country," wrote MacDonald, "regard with anxiety what appears to them to be the determination of France to ruin Germany."² Germany would always represent the aggressor nation to the French mind, and French military and political action between the World Wars would be directed at containing Germany so that France could remain the major continental power.

France's most pressing problem was security.

¹William Orton, Twenty Years Armistice: 1919-1938 (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, Inc., 1938), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 12

Clemenceau failed in his bid to gain a guarantee of protection from Britain or the United States at Versailles, and France set out to defend herself with a defensive agreement with Belgium in 1920, and a Franco-Polish treaty the following year that eventually widened to include Czechoslovakia in 1924, Rumania in 1926, and Yugoslavia in 1927.³

Britain, on the other hand, was showing a definite inclination to isolationism while Italy turned her eyes on the Mediterranean and Germany loomed large on France's eastern border. The Locarno Treaty of December, 1925, had included a mutual guarantee of the Franco-German border and was signed with such good will that the European powers were soothed for some years by the "spirit of Locarno." On March 17, 1926, Germany continued her policy of friendship by applying to the League of Nations, and, on September 8, Germany was granted a permanent seat on the Council. Foreign Minister Aristide Briand of France and American Secretary of State Frank Kellogg used this period to propose the naive Pact of Paris that included the Renunciation of War and was signed by Europe's major powers, and this was followed by the Litvinov Protocol that was signed by the eastern European powers and seemingly ended the threat of

³Ernest John Knapton, France Since Versailles (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), p. 23.

war in Europe.

The glow of fellowship dimmed and finally extinguished itself with the depression year of 1929. The economy of Europe crumbled and a pall draped the political scene. By 1930 France's exports and imports fell with the tourist trade. Unemployment, which had averaged less than 2,500 from 1926 to 1930, rose to 351,000 in 1934, and to 503,000 the following year.⁴ Wholesale prices in France dropped by one-third during the period, and industrial production fell 22 per cent.⁵

Britain abandoned the gold standard in September, 1931, but France retained it making her prices disastrously high by comparison on the world market and destroying any possibility of a balance in foreign trade.

France was on unsettled ground. The government, unstable since World War One, was rocked when President Paul Doumer was assassinated by a Russian émigré named Gourgoulov on May 6, 1932. Albert Lebrun became President with the 1932 elections in which Leftist parties swept the Chamber. The United Socialists raised their membership by 17 to 129, and the Radical Socialists became the leading Chamber party

⁴Ibid., p. 27.

⁵Paul Reynaud, In the Thick of the Fight: 1930-1945, trans. James D. Lambert (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 14.

with a jump of 48 to 157 seats. The Left managed to gain control of 350 seats in all, leaving only something over 250 opposition seats.⁶

Edouard Herriot, now in his third ministry, became the first Premier under Lebrun, and he was not up to the job of running a government that lacked even tradition. Emile Roche set forth a practical economic platform in May. The plan reduced the labor force by removing foreigners, lowered the age of retirement, extended compulsory education, shortened working hours, encouraged small business, watched prices, established credit houses, guaranteed bank deposits, and even changed the system of public works. The Roche plan was adopted and then forgotten.⁷

Herriot's problem was to find a way to keep the Socialists out of power without splitting the Radicals, annoying the electors, or making the Radicals seem responsible. To accomplish this he let the Socialists submit conditions, and then he refused them. He avoided contact with Socialist leaders and he arranged for the Radicals' Executive Committee to meet after the Socialists' Congress

⁶Knapton, op. cit., p. 29.

⁷Peter J. Larmour, The French Radical Party in the 1930's (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1964), p. 67.

instead of before it. The Socialists made demands on defense spending cuts, nationalization of the arms industry, control of the banks, nationalization of the railroads, a forty-hour week, and even political amnesty, and Radicals rejected every demand. Léon Blum, the Socialist leader, had originally demanded a weaker program that Herriot had found uneasy to reject, but these new demands were refused without arousing opposition.⁸

Herriot, then, was successful in beating the Socialists, but he faced disaster in his budget call for 19 million dollars to meet the December war debt owed America. Herriot asked for the money and did not receive it. The government shook, and then fell in December, 1932. Herriot would later learn that his collapse had been for no reason as the budget already included the payment to America.

The year 1933 saw four new ministries. The Paul-Boncour government was for the Christmas holidays. Amazingly, the budget was balanced on paper with a five billion franc cut that was accompanied by a five billion franc tax increase. Henry Chéron, however, abandoned the bill the moment it was exposed to opposition. The Socialists suddenly claimed to have found nine billion francs by

⁸Ibid., p. 115.

financial manipulation and nationalization (of course) of the insurance companies. The nationalization of the companies was rejected, and the government fell from the experience.⁹

Edouard Daladier of the Radical Socialists took over in January and lasted until October. Daladier came into office at the same time the Nazis took over in Germany, but, unlike the Nazis, he was unable to outlast the depression. On February 2 a promising disarmament conference met in Geneva with the governments of Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain working on a plan to outlaw force in Europe. Germany, however, killed the "spirit of Locarno" when they walked out of the conference and withdrew from the League of Nations on October 14 and October 23 respectively. It was now obvious that Germany was not going to be satisfied with taking a lesser role in the balance of power, and Daladier's government was unable to last through this realization.

⁹Ibid., p. 125.

CHAPTER II

THE DARKENING CLOUD

With a strong German state growing in the East, France naturally experienced an upswing in the number of militant Rightist groups springing up in opposition to the inefficiency of the parliamentary regimes. Orléanists, Bonapartists, and Nationalists adopted a Rightist ideology that desired to repudiate the "Principles of 1789." In 1789 the royal family had been denied most of its powers, and, in 1933, Monseigneur Le Duc de Guise, who claimed the right to the throne of France as King Jean III, issued a manifesto from his manor near Brussels that proclaimed that Jean III was ready and willing to occupy the throne.¹⁰ These Rightist groups adopted the attitude long held by financial and industrial leaders, parts of the French Army, and even certain Catholic groups that favored the return of a King.¹¹

The oldest such group was Action Française, founded by Charles Maurras in 1905. In 1927 this group was denounced by the papacy and its writings were assigned to

¹⁰News item in Time, February 13, 1933, p. 15.

¹¹Knapton, op. cit., p. 30.

the Index. Action Française hoped to revive the France of old. Jews, Protestants, Freemasons, and foreigners in general were to be deprived of power. Another such group was Pierre Tattinger's Jeunesses Patriotes which made use of "shock troops" on cars and motorcycles. In 1934 Tattinger's group numbered about 240,000. Le Faisceau was even more military in organization and used strict discipline on its uniformed members. Ex-servicemen often chose to join Colonel de la Rocque's Croix de Feu which became the rallying point for young conservatives who claimed to be the sons of veterans. Solidarite Française, which was extremely anti-Semitic, found backing for its 250,000 members from François Coty, the perfume maker. This Bonapartist group wore uniforms similar to those of Nazi storm troopers, and the double headed ax became their symbol.¹² Other leading industrialists who were Fascistically inclined were Pierre and Marcel Michelin, famous tire manufacturers, who employed members of the Comité Secret d'Action Revolutionnaire as engineers or chemists.¹³

Although these groups represent a fair portion of

¹²Ibid., p. 31.

¹³Heinz Pol, Suicide of a Democracy, trans. Heinz and Ruth Norden (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1940), p. 9.

France's population, it is important to realize that the Action Française and the Croix de Feu (which numbered 250,000) were the most influential.¹⁴

The Alexandre Stavisky scandal that became public on December 28, 1933, brought the Rightist groups into their most influential period. Stavisky had bought the influence of two Radical deputies, Joseph Garat and Gaston Bonnaure, while his political lawyers managed to procure 19 adjournments of a trial that had been pending since 1927. During this period Stavisky swindled 500 million francs under the protection of public officials. On January 8 Stavisky was found dead and Premier Camille Chautemps (who had been in office since November) and his Radical party were discredited. Chautemps resigned on January 27, and rioting set in when Royalists and fascists stirred up an agitation that recalled the famous Dreyfus case.¹⁵ The riots came to a head on February 6, 1934, in the Place de la Concorde where the Solidarité Française, the Camelots du Roi, and some members of the Croix de Feu headed a movement that brought Paris near open revolt. Some people were killed, hundreds were wounded, and the Chamber of Deputies braced

¹⁴Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁵Larmour, op. cit., p. 141.

for invasion.¹⁶ On February 12 a general one day strike went into effect and the two-week old Daladier government resigned in fear and Gaston Doumergue started his second ministry. Doumergue's government had a Rightist Cabinet and an ambitious Foreign Minister named Jean Louis Barthou.

The period beginning with the elections of 1932 ended violently in February, 1934. The riots of February Sixth transformed French politics by inaugurating a period of uncertainty that may still be seen in France. The riots reflected public frustration that dated from the election of 1932. The Right was not satisfied with being out of power so they used the Stavisky case to split the Radicals and Socialists.

¹⁶Knapton, op. cit., p. 32.

CHAPTER III

BARTHOU AND LAVAL

Jean Louis Barthou was a Foreign Minister who accepted the death of Locarno and read Mein Kampf in German. France, he decided, must be secured against the German threat. He was intelligent, determined, and had enough energy to give meaning to French diplomacy. To do this he set about to breathe new life into old alliances, and to sign new treaties. He envisioned an "Eastern Locarno" that would be a defensive alliance providing for immediate military assistance in the event of invasion. The countries to be involved would be Germany, the Soviet Union, the four Baltic States, Poland, and Czechoslovakia.¹⁷ In September, 1934, Barthou worked with Russian Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov to get Russia into the League of Nations, and then he toured Europe in an attempt to stabilize the Polish-German border. The ambitious Foreign Minister had the misfortune to be assassinated with King Alexander of Yugoslavia on October 9 at Marseilles. Doumergue's ministry fell in November after he had proposed

¹⁷René Albrecht-Carrie, A Diplomatic History of Europe Since the Congress of Vienna (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 473.

a constitutional reform calling for a change of ministry to necessitate a new election as in England. Pierre Flandin, Fernand Bouisson, Pierre Laval, and Albert Sarraut would all have ministries before the election of 1936.

By the terms of the Treaty of Versailles the Saar had been under a fifteen-year trial period and, in January, 1935, a plebiscite was held. The Saar had remained German in character, but the French hoped that the advent of Nazism in Germany might sway large numbers of Catholics and Socialists to vote for France. The voting took place on January 13, and a full 90 per cent favored Germany. On March 1, 1935, the Saar was returned and Hitler made a characteristic statement declaring that Germany was satisfied and no more land claims would be laid before France.¹⁸ In January, with hopes of establishing a strong front against the German menace, Pierre Laval signed an agreement with Italy which gave the latter a number of concessions in Africa.

On March 16, 1935, Germany formally denounced the clauses of the Treaty of Versailles concerning her disarmament. The step was based on the failure of the other powers to disarm as provided for in the treaty.¹⁹ This

¹⁸Ibid., p. 477.

¹⁹William L. Langer (comp.) An Encyclopedia of World History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 963.

move caused the foreign ministers of France, Britain, and Italy to meet at Stresa to form the "Stresa Front" designed to maintain peace in Europe. The meeting registered a condemnation of Germany's methods and reaffirmed loyalty to Locarno and the independence of an Austria threatened by the Nazis. Also, the idea of an Italian-Franco-Anglo front to stop Germany was revived.²⁰

France reacted to Germany's move by introducing a two-year period for military service and, in May, 1935, a five year defensive alliance with Soviet Russia was announced. Laval had pressed for this agreement with less vigor than Barthou, but even so a Laval-Litvinov Protocol was signed in Geneva in April. From then, until May 2, when the agreement was signed, negotiations between Laval and Litvinov were taking place.

The Army favored a mutual assistance pact with the Russians, and General Gamelin, Chief of Staff, based his opinion on the Russian Army's aid to France in 1914, and the strategic advantages of a friendly Russia.²¹

The finished pact consisted of a Treaty of Mutual Assistance and a Protocol of Signature which was signed by Laval and Vladimir Potemkin. If not denounced in five

²⁰Albrecht-Carrie, op. cit., p. 479.

²¹William Evans Scott, Alliance Against Hitler (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1962), p.195.

years, the pact would remain in force until it was denounced. Article I concerned the threat or danger of attack. If threatened, the countries would consult the League of Nations. Article II guaranteed mutual assistance in the event of actual attack. Article III repeated the pledge of mutual assistance even if the League acted against the aggressor. The treaty was clearly aimed at Germany. France would not become involved if an attack were made on Russia in the Far East. The Protocol of Signature made it evident that "European State" meant Germany.²²

On June 18 the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was signed and Germany could legally build up to 35 per cent of Britain's naval tonnage. Italy invaded Ethiopia in September and France suddenly seemed isolated from any possible agreements on her eastern border. Trouble in Africa was awkward, and had to be avoided at all costs. Mussolini used his position to bargain, and Laval explained the situation to the French Chamber. To Laval, peace was worth "ruling out everything that might lead to war."²³

On March 17, 1936, the German Foreign Minister, von Neurath, assembled the Locarno powers and handed them a

²²Ibid., pp. 246-247.

²³Albrecht-Carrie, op. cit., p. 488.

note that denounced the Rhineland Pact and explained that, at the moment, "symbolic detachments" of Germany's forces were marching into the demilitarized zone. The Germans justified their action by blaming the Franco-Soviet Pact for violating Locarno. The Locarno Powers, in turn, met in London and brilliantly decided that Germany had violated the treaty.²⁴ The "spirit of Locarno" had been killed without a shot being fired.

As Hitler's troops hiked into the Rhineland with orders to retreat if threatened, the Albert Sarraut Cabinet refused to order intervention, possibly because it was the eve of an election. England likewise decided to watch, and in one move the French were natives of a second-class power in Europe. A connection with Britain became more important now that Germany and Italy were military powers. Both England and France could comfort each other as satisfied, declining powers with defensive interests. And with the cloud in the east moving in on France, the elections of 1936 offered a fresh new government.

²⁴Ibid., p. 493.

CHAPTER IV

THE POPULAR FRONT

In February, 1934, the General Confederation of Labor along with the Communist Unions had called a brief strike during the Rightist demonstrations. Five months later the Communists and Socialists signed a United Action Pact designed to defend democratic liberties, and Gaston Bergery, a Radical leader, formed the "Common Front" to appeal to the bourgeois groups who opposed the financial factions. In the 1935 Bastille Day parade, 300,000 Radicals, Socialists, and Communists marched together through Paris. This culminated in a "Rassemblement Populaire" made up of ten organizations that issued a Popular Front Program on January 11, 1936, in anticipation of the election. The ten organizations included four parties (Communist, Socialist, Radical Socialist, and Socialist Republic Union), two labor groups (General Confederation of Labor and the Community Trade Union Federation), and four Leftist groups (Comité Mondial Contre le Fascisme et la Guerre, Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels et Anti-Fascistes, and the Mouvement d'Action Combattante).²⁵

²⁵Knapton, op. cit., p. 35.

The Popular Front Program had four main aims. One, the Defense of Freedom, included measures against fascist leagues, measures to purify the press and public life, guarantees of trade-union liberties, and mandatory education until the age of fourteen. Another, the Defense of Peace, supported the League of Nations, collective security and disarmament, and the nationalization of the war industries. Economic Demands involved measures against unemployment, reductions in the length of the working week, pensions for the elderly, public works program, a board for marketing grain, the strengthening of agricultural cooperatives, strict control of private banks, and the nationalization of the Bank of France. Finally, Financial Purification offered control of armaments trade, war pensions, a steeply graduated income tax, and a vigorous campaign against tax evaders.²⁶

The Popular Front swept the 1936 election by gaining control of 389 seats against the Right's 223. The Socialist party became the leading single party with 149 deputies. The Radical Socialists managed 111 representatives while the Communists gained 62 seats to give them a total of 72. While the right lost power, their vote, at 4,202,298, was

²⁶Ibid.

only 106,419 behind their 1932 number.²⁷ Never before had the French electorate favored a program so heavily. The opposition, with the exception of votes from Alsace-Lorraine, proved no match for the Front.²⁸

In June the Popular Front took office with Léon Blum heading the government. Blum, leader of the Socialist party, had been born to a wealthy Jewish manufacturing family. He tried to live up to the promises of the Front's platform with a series of Franklin Roosevelt type reforms. Soon after taking office, Blum was confronted with a series of sit-down strikes which led to the "Matignon Agreement" between labor and employees. The agreement became legal in the Collective Contracts Act of June, 1936, and it recognized collective bargaining and wage increases amounting to seven to fifteen per cent. The forty-hour week and paid vacations were enacted. In order to curb speculation, a Wheat Office was organized for governmental purchasing and price-fixing. The Bank of France became the government's puppet when a general council picked by government, unions, agriculture, business, and those connected with the bank was appointed to run the bank.²⁹

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Geoffrey Fraser and Thadée Natanson, Léon Blum, Man and Statesman (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1938), p. 258.

²⁹Knapton, op. cit., p. 36.

In September the franc, which had previously been valued at 6.6 cents, dropped to 4.6 cents and an exchange stabilization fund was organized.³⁰ In February, 1937, a pause was announced in the Popular Front's Program.

The Popular Front had promised to strive for collective security and to support the League of Nations in foreign affairs. The beginning of the Spanish Civil War on July 18, 1936, however, had caught Blum without a definite policy so his government took Britain's lead and the two countries arranged an international agreement against intervention that was easily ignored by any country that chose to do so. Then, on October 25, the signing of the Rome-Berlin Axis followed Count Ciano's visit to Berlin and Blum saw his plan for collective security become remote. Italy and Germany had joined in a marriage of convenience on Spain's testing grounds. The Rome-Berlin Axis was designed to focus the contrast between the decadent Western systems and the powers of the Axis. It was followed in November by a German-Japanese agreement which carried on the idea of a crusading Axis policy. The Franco-Soviet connection was badly shaken, and France became even more helpless.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Albrecht-Carrie, op. cit., p. 505.

In June the Senate refused plenary powers to Blum's government, and on June 19 the Cabinet resigned. The country had not been ready to accept Blum's programs. A handful of bankers and producers had refused to grant credits to the government or nationalize their plants.³² Furthermore, it may be argued that the Popular Front was out of phase. Its occupations were social reform and the fight against fascism at a time when social reform was being taken for granted and the enemy was Communism.³³

³²Pierre Cot, "The Breakup of the Franco-Russian Alliance," The Fall of France, 1940, Samuel M. Osgood, editor (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1965), pp. 47-48.

³³Larmour, op. cit., p. 212.

CHAPTER V

AFTER 1936

The Right in France adopted the idea that Hitler was not the evil to the east. The evil, they claimed, was Stalin, and Hitler should be granted his wishes so that he could halt Communism. France, they said, should look to the Mediterranean and protect her colonies there.³⁴

On March 11, 1938, Hitler moved into Austria. France was without a government at the time, and England, acting alone, offered no resistance to the Germans. The second Blum ministry, once formed, offered only a meaningless protest, but Paul-Boncour informed the Czechs on March 15 that France intended to come "instantly and effectively" to their support should the need arise. Talk, once again, was cheap, and the Blum government fell in less than a month.

Edouard Daladier had been Premier in 1933 and 1934, and in April, 1938, he again took the premiership. Nicknamed "the bull of Vancluse," Daladier was a man of the people who enjoyed being known as a strong, silent fellow who could maintain the government. Somehow he managed to hold his office until March, 1940, and during

³⁴Knapton, op. cit., p. 39.

his reign he tried to speed up armament production, suspend some Popular Front acts, and mobilize the country through legislation in case of war. The forty-hour week was modified, expenditures reduced, and heavier taxes were placed on wages and profits. Defense industries were allowed a sixty-hour week, and government credit was granted the war industries. The government had the power to rule by decree, and the index of production jumped from 83 to 100 between November, 1938, and the war (using 1928 for a base). Daladier refused, however, to create an armaments ministry, and there was a lack of coordination between government agencies.³⁵

Georges Bonnet, who had been implicated in the Stavisky scandal, now controlled foreign affairs. Bonnet, like the Right, was ready to appease the Nazis in the face of the Communist threat. He was soon faced with the German-Czechoslovak crisis in September. The 3.5 million German speaking people in the Sudeten were allowed to fall under Hitler's control, and Bonnet and Daladier even brought pressure on the Czechs to make them give in even though Bonnet had declared in a speech of July 4 that France would remain faithful to her pacts and treaties. By September 21, the same Foreign Minister was telling Czech

³⁵Ibid., p. 41.

President Benes³⁶ that if he refused to give up the Sudeten there would be no help from France or Britain in the event of war. Czechoslovakia met the Nazi (and British and ~~Turkey~~ French) demands and the French system of alliances became seriously undermined.³⁶

Daladier bathed in cheers when he returned to Paris. The Chamber of Deputies had not met during the crisis, but now they gave the government a vote of 543 to 75 in favor of its foreign policy. All but two of those who opposed were Communists who could easily see the approaching fall of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Poland was now effectively isolated, and France enjoyed her crushing diplomatic defeat in cheers.³⁷

On December 6, 1938, Bonnet and von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister since February 4, concluded the Franco-German Pact that recognized their borders as definite, promised to cultivate good relations, and both countries agreed to consult on matters of common concern.³⁸

On March 15, 1939, the remainder of Czechoslovakia fell into Hitler's hands and even the Right saw the danger. An official protest was issued on the 18th, and Britain and

³⁶Ibid., p. 42.

³⁷Ibid., p. 43.

³⁸Ibid.

France promised Poland that her independence was secure. On April 13 Daladier went out on a limb and made the same promise to Rumania and Greece, and negotiations with Turkey got underway. Britain and France also started hopeful negotiations with Russia for a new mutual-assistance pact with a joint guarantee covering Finland, the Baltic States, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Greece, but the pact was rejected because it was too comprehensive. Discussions continued into August, and France was hopeful of a settlement when the Germans threatened Danzig and the Polish Corridor. On August 23, however, the British and French were shocked to learn that a German-Russian non-aggression pact had been signed.³⁹

On August 30 Germany started general mobilization, and, on September 1, they crossed the frontier into Poland.

³⁹Albrecht-Carrie, op. cit., p. 538.

CHAPTER VI

THE FRENCH ARMY

France was not eager to wage war again in 1939. Following Germany's defeat in World War One the French Army had been, for many years, the most formidable and well equipped in Europe. There was, actually, no competition because the German Army was limited to a weak hundred thousand men who would serve without modern equipment. In 1936, with the re-occupation of the Rhineland, France for the first time found reason to weigh the strength of her army. Albert Sarraut, the Premier, at first objected vocally to the Germans, then consulted his experts, and finally changed his tone when he discovered that the French Army possessed not even a single anti-aircraft gun, no anti-tank guns, and the troops were incapable of mobilization.⁴⁰ Both France and Germany had 25 full-strength divisions, but when one considers the possible British support of 154,000 troops to come to France's aid, the balance was against Germany. Hitler later admitted that "the forty-eight hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-wracking of my whole life. . . . If

⁴⁰ Pierre Cot, Triumph of Treason, trans. Sybille and Milton Crane (New York: Ziff Davis, 1944), p. 172.

the French had marched into the Rhineland we should have had to retreat with ignominy."⁴¹

Daladier, as Minister of War in the Popular Front three months later, asked for reports on the modern equipment of France and her enemies. Germany, it was reported, had a thousand tanks while France had tanks left from World War One and thirty-four modern ones. The Maginot Line, Daladier must have been shocked to learn, did not have a single anti-tank gun, and the General Staff had not yet selected an anti-aircraft gun. The French Air-Force was somewhat better off with 607 airplanes under three years old.⁴²

The theory of war used by France's military leaders was based on the French warfare of World War One. No lessons had reached the French from the Spanish Civil War. Men like Charles DeGaulle, who pleaded for an overhaul of the armored divisions, were ignored. DeGaulle had been impressed by German military ideas and, realizing the folly of trying to inform the General Staff, he approached the public. DeGaulle proposed a complete reform of the French military situation based on the formation of a small professional army of 10,000 men with modern material and

⁴¹William J. Newman, The Balance of Power in the Interwar Years, 1919-1939 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 139.

⁴²Cot, loc. cit.

grouped into six motorized divisions with scouting units. He considered Minister of War Pétain senile and he launched a book, Vers l'Armée de Metier (Towards a Professional Army), to sell his views.⁴³ Although printed in several languages, the book sold best in Germany and Russia (where the sales were four times that of the book in France), but in France the Minister of War put down DeGaulle's ideas because "France's plan of mobilization rests on the principle of defense."⁴⁴ The high command had indeed concentrated on defense. The historic mass army remained, and the French were convinced that a new war would be another war of attrition. The great bastion known as the Maginot Line protected France along the German border from the Swiss border to Montmédy, near Luxemburg. The line had been the child of Paul Painlevé, the 1928 Minister of War, and his successor André Maginot. In 1932 proposals were made to extend the line but the Superior War Council scrapped the plan. The War Council and the Ministers of War did many strange things.

France had dragged in the weapons race. The years 1934 and 1935 had been the crucial ones. While war budgets

⁴³Jean-Raymond Tournoux, Sons of France: Pétain and DeGaulle, trans. Oliver Coburn (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 74.

⁴⁴Cot, op. cit., p. 185.

rose throughout Europe, the French budget was cut. The Chief of Staff was General Weygand who was sixty-eight years old. In 1935 he was followed by seventy-two year old General Maurin, and both men continued to follow the lead started by Pétain in 1933. These men lacked the ability to act. The Supreme War Council was not called while these men held office. No reform projects, plans of operation, or timetable for armament was set up. From 1933 to 1935, Germany's national defense expenditures rose from 299.5 million dollars to 2,600 millions. France, on the other hand, reduced both the 1934 and 1935 budgets.⁴⁵ Germany's military spending from 1933 to 1939 was six times that of France.⁴⁶

France, from 1933 until 1939, was the victim of shaky, insecure governments. No Premier, with the possible exception of Edouard Daladier's third ministry (April, 1938, to March, 1940), was able to gain the confidence of the Cabinet long enough to pass the required measures for keeping France a world power. The great number of political parties fighting for power made it difficult for a

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁶H. C. Hillman, "Comparative Strength of the Great Powers," Survey of International Affairs, 1939-1946, Arnold Toynbee and Frank T. Ashton--Gwatkin, editor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 455.

Premier to obtain a confidence vote, and the ministries were never able to act as they would have liked to. France, then, has given the world a blueprint for failure through the use of weak governments.

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