

FRANCE since 1918
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7 Defeat and Occupation: 1939-1944

France, at war with Hitler's Germany since 3 September 1939, was to know no respite from her internal dissensions. The Soviet-German pact had considerably shaken the residual patriotism of the large number of Frenchmen – about a fifth of the all-male electorate – who had for many years shown their sympathy for the aims of Communism. But, for a start, even the leader of the P C F, Maurice Thorez, joined his army unit. His party had proclaimed the struggle to be an anti-Fascist one and, given the long-standing feud between Communism and Fascism, the participation in it of French Communists seemed to make sense. Nevertheless, at the end of September 1939, Daladier dissolved the P C F. He was clearly assuming that the rapprochement between Moscow and Berlin made the P C F a potentially subversive organisation. He was soon proved right. Three days after the dissolution of the P C F the Governments of Berlin and Moscow jointly told the Western allies that they should accept the new situation in eastern Europe and end the war. By then the armies of the U S S R had sliced off the eastern part of Poland and thus helped the Germans to complete their defeat of the Polish forces. On 1 October over 30 Communist Deputies of the French Parliament sent a letter to the President of the Chamber of Deputies asking that the Soviet-German proposition be accepted. P C F newspapers, driven underground by the dissolution of their party, also began clamouring for peace. Thorez deserted and made his way to the Soviet Union, where he stayed the rest of the war. The effect of these events on the morale of a considerable number of French soldiers was disastrous.

But it was not only the Communists who threw doubt upon the point of continuing the war once Poland had been defeated. Members of the French Right expressed similar opinions, and Flandin openly asked the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies whether the war was really worth going on with. Since the Germans had disposed of the Poles, the Western front – never very active – had settled down into the boring inactivity of the so-called

'phony war', with the Germans behind their Siegfried Line and the French in the bunkers of the Maginot Line, while the British were making their leisurely way across to France. There was no one to push anybody into action. The rural population, having been nursed on Daladier's appeasement policy, needed little convincing that if the Germans did not attack France there was no reason for attacking them. And the bourgeoisie was no more bellicose, especially since it was inclined to see the real enemy in Bolshevism rather than in Fascism. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that the winter of 1939-40 was militarily not an eventful one in the West.

But the French and the British apparently had a good deal of confidence in their ability to cope with the Germans. For when the U S S R launched its attack on Finland at the end of November 1939, not only did they seriously contemplate sending troops to help the Helsinki Government, but they viewed with apparently total equanimity the possible consequence of having to take on the Soviet Union as well as Germany. They were also thinking of bombing the oil-fields in the Ukraine which were supplying Hitler. It was in fact over his failure to help the Finns that Daladier had to resign in March 1940, though his translation to the Ministry of Defence by his successor, Paul Reynaud, promised little change in the French war effort against Germany.

It was a great surprise to the French when the Germans attacked Denmark and Norway in April 1940. Reynaud learnt of the attack from a Reuter dispatch, a disquieting reflection on French and British intelligence. The Franco-British force that was improvised for service in Norway was unmistakably defeated by the Germans. Although in England this defeat led to the fall of Chamberlain and his replacement by Winston Churchill, in France Paul Reynaud remained in office to preside over the final agony of his country.

In May 1940, Hitler's troops attacked in the West. They swept through the Low Countries. Then, without encountering more than sporadically serious opposition, the German armoured divisions out-flanked the Maginot Line and raced through northern France. Paris was occupied on 14 June. Four days earlier, seeing the way things were going, Mussolini had ventured to declare war on France and Britain.

For France and Britain, but particularly for France, these were nightmare days. In their frantic search for some way of saving themselves from annihilation, the French issued repeated appeals to Britain and the United States for all possible assistance. At the end

of May, Reynaud had thought of sending his Air Minister even to Moscow with a request for planes, but had to abandon the idea when it was made clear to him that his Parliament would not stand for it, and that Marshal Pétain, as implacably hostile to the Communists as ever, would resign as Vice Premier. As the disintegration of French and British forces became patently irreversible, Churchill was led to suggest that France and Britain should become one united nation. The least that can be said is that this would, at any rate technically, have kept the large French Empire in the war beside Britain. Though Reynaud appeared to be favourable to this idea, most of his Cabinet was not. Cornered at Bordeaux, Reynaud's Government resigned. The legal representatives of the French thereupon asked Marshal Pétain to lead them. Pétain was then 84.

The population of France seemed to be living in a trance. Millions of French men and women were blocking the roads, fleeing before the invading armies. They thus impeded whatever their own forces might have done to save them, and in their turn became targets for German air attacks. Millions of dazed French soldiers suddenly found themselves behind German barbed wire as prisoners of war. At the same time, Marshal Pétain, whom the French revered as the victor of Verdun, was beginning to tell his countrymen that their past frivolousness was responsible for their present plight, and invited them to set out along the penitential path to national regeneration. 'At such a time of disaster, if one stopped and thought for a moment, it could be only to be disquieted that France, as her only resource, had but an old man, laden with glory and years, who still remembered having learned his catechism from a chaplain who had been a veteran of the Grand Army' (Robert Aron).

Late on 16 June Marshal Pétain's new Government asked the Germans to state their terms for an armistice. On the following day, French forces still offering resistance stopped fighting after their Prime Minister in a radio broadcast had given the country to understand that the war had to end. On 21 June the German conditions arrived. The only two prizes which even Pétain's Government would have adamantly refused to surrender, the French fleet and the Empire, were not demanded. Negotiations thereupon began, in the same railway coach that had seen the German surrender in 1918. It was resolved that about two-fifths of France – in the southern half, but excluding the Atlantic coast – should remain a free zone, but that even in the rest of the country the German Army would not interfere with the administration, except to guarantee its own

security. The French fleet was to be demobilised and disarmed. After some argument it was agreed that the French Air Force was to be treated similarly, rather than have its planes surrendered to the Germans. There was also a clause, challenged by Pétain but on which the Germans insisted, that the French should hand over to the Germans those of their nationals in France who had been guilty of incitement to war; this was the thin end of a very big wedge. In contrast, on 23 June the French met an almost apologetic Italian delegation and arranged an armistice that was devoid of onerous clauses.

While the armistice negotiations were taking place a serious misunderstanding occurred between the British and French Governments. Ever since defeat had threatened in France, the British had been understandably worried about the fate of the French fleet. A request by Churchill that it should sail to British ports had been turned down by Reynaud when he was still Prime Minister, but Pétain, too, had undertaken that it would in no circumstances fall into German hands. Apparently unaware that the British Government had renewed its request that French warships should proceed to British ports, the Pétain Government failed to send a reply, a failure Churchill's Cabinet thought ominous. Matters were made worse when the French appeared reluctant to inform the British Ambassador of the terms of the armistice: this they had promised to do as soon as the terms were known. The Ambassador, and probably the British Government too, concluded that the French had after all done a deal with the Germans involving their fleet. It was a misunderstanding which suddenly brought Anglo-French relations to breaking point. In accordance with a plan drafted the moment there was doubt in Britain about the provisions of the armistice, the Royal Navy launched an attack on French ships in the port of Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July. Having been unable to persuade the French Admiral in command to join forces with him, or to sail to a port acceptable to the British, the Commander of the Royal Naval Force, in accordance with his orders, destroyed the French fleet. Altogether 297 French sailors were killed or missing, 351 were wounded. Moreover, French warships in British ports were seized and their crews interned. French merchant ships in British ports were also seized. The French fleet in Alexandria was immobilised by a private arrangement between the British and French admirals in command there.

The reaction of the French Government to these totally unexpected

British actions was extraordinarily moderate. Refusing to heed the promptings of their immediate anger, and the risk of war with their former ally that this would have entailed, Pétain's Government contented itself with a strong protest, the severing of diplomatic relations, and the symbolic bombing of Gibraltar where six French planes dropped their bombs into the sea. Even this limited response, however, impressed the Germans who, by way of reward, allowed the French a small degree of rearmament.

Against this background of defeat and isolation, two men emerged who were to have a profound effect on the shaping of the New Order in France that Marshal Pétain had proclaimed on the occasion of the armistice. They were Pierre Laval and Raphaël Alibert. Laval, although he had played a prominent rôle in the Third Republic, had finally come to detest it. The Popular Front and its successors had prevented him from carrying out his project of conciliating Italy and had then successfully kept him out of office until 1940. After the armistice, when Pétain made him Vice Premier, Laval was to take his chance to exact revenge and promote his own schemes with his customary vigour. Alibert, on the other hand, was a constitutional lawyer whose politics, until Pétain made him his Under Secretary of State, had been almost entirely theoretical. But, as a proponent of *Action Française* doctrines, he had succeeded even before the war in impressing Pétain with his authoritarian theories and had later become his doctrinal adviser. By all accounts Alibert suffered from many defects, the most pronounced of which was megalomania. Until early in 1941, when the Marshal was finally persuaded to dismiss him, Alibert was to spend his time imperiously scheming with Laval, first to destroy what remained of the democratic institutions of the Third Republic, then to substitute an authoritarian régime. Both men were also almost pathologically anti-British, Laval largely because of British opposition to his foreign policy in the thirties, Alibert in accordance with the traditional *Action Française* philosophy that what was good for Britain must be bad for France. Both could therefore envisage with relative equanimity a European order based on German supremacy, having recognised the completeness of the collapse of their own country and expecting the imminent defeat of Britain. Their obsessive anti-Bolshevism could only reinforce their fellow-feeling for Nazi Germany, despite the transitory truce between Berlin and Moscow.

On 1 July 1940 the French Government arrived at Vichy in the

free zone. There, on the tenth, after many days of bitter debate, Laval succeeded in obtaining the agreement of the assembled Senators and Deputies to the granting of full constituent and legislative powers for Pétain. Out of a possible attendance of 932, 649 members of the two Houses were present, and only 80 voted against Laval's project. Describing the debate and the atmosphere in which it took place, Blum said:

For two days I watched men debasing themselves, becoming corrupt beneath one's eyes, as if they had been plunged into a bath of poison. They were possessed by fear: the fear of Doriot's gangs in the streets, the fear of Weygand's soldiers at Clermont-Ferrand, the fear of the Germans who were at Moulins... It was a human swamp in which one saw, I repeat, beneath one's very eyes, the courage and integrity one had known in certain men dissolve, corrode, disappear.

Indeed, Laval had made much play with the likelihood of a Weygand military dictatorship if the Parliamentarians proved obstreperous, and made their flesh creep with the thought of an impatient Hitler seizing the whole of France and imposing his own order in his own way. The result of Laval's success was that Pétain had the powers of an absolute monarch legally conferred on him, and Laval's own expectation was that he would take the place of the venerable Head of State in due course.

Outside the free zone life began to develop separately, despite Vichy's nominal administrative responsibility there. Paris, half promised to the French Government at the armistice negotiations, became a vast German garrison town, in which the victors threatened to install a government of their own choice whenever Vichy seemed to hesitate over doing as it was told. Signposts in German were to be seen all over the city; so were the posters that advertised the amusements for Hitler's troops as they were waiting to cross to England. On the other hand, references to Jews, where not insulting, were everywhere removed, for example in street names; by September 1940, Jews were openly persecuted. Newspapers and other printed matter were subjected to German censorship; given the new climate between Berlin and Moscow, it is perhaps not surprising that the Communist *L'Humanité* was one of the first papers to reappear after the defeat. Food quickly became scarce, largely because the Germans bought it up with French money obtained in a variety of unusual ways. And if, at first, the French were struck by the excel-

lent behaviour of the occupation army, by the end of 1940 the first timid signs of renascent French patriotism made the Germans show their claws. It was then that the people of France could remain in no doubt that their earlier premonitions, which had made them flee from the enemy invasion, had been only too well-founded. What was worse, some of the most dreadful excesses against the French were to be committed by Frenchmen dedicated to Nazi ideals.

During the early months after the defeat, the National Revolution had got under way in the free zone. With its motto 'Work, Family, Country', instead of the old 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', it sought to persuade the French of the errors of their democratic past. France was to rededicate herself to the simple life and traditional hierarchic morality. It was said to be her only hope for the future. 'It may happen', said Pétain, 'that one of our peasants sees his harvest devastated by hail. He does not despair of the next harvest'. The Marshal's imagery provided an adequate summary of an important part of the ethos he wanted to promote. But he did not just leave it at general appeals to contrition and spiritual renewal. He also went in for the kind of moralising that must have made many of his most ardent admirers squirm: 'Think upon these maxims: Pleasure lowers, joy elevates; pleasure weakens, joy gives strength.' It was this kind of tone, typical of Vichy, which helped to give it its air of unreality. One is left wondering how even the Marshal's *Action Française* entourage that had been largely responsible for the National Revolution could have expected it to succeed in France, shell-shocked though the population was. On the other hand, Pétain's emphasis on the land, the need for the French to make it work for them, fitted in with Hitler's plan for Europe. Hitler expected Germany to be Europe's industrial centre, and the lands around it to feed it. Since Pétain knew what Hitler's design was, it is clear that he recommended the acceptance of France's status within it.

Already in July 1940, the nationalist as well as the authoritarian aspects of the National Revolution had made themselves felt. Employment in State-controlled jobs was closed to all who could not boast a French father. All naturalisations granted since 1927 were to be reviewed. By October, all Jews, French-born and with or without French fathers, were banned from most public posts, as well as from prominent positions in industry and the press. The authoritarianism of the régime had reached the stage, by the end of 1940,

when 'no single person, whatever his associations or his personal status ... might not become subject to administrative sanctions' (Robert Aron). But already before then the Vichy Government had set up a Court to try the Ministers of the Third Republic 'accused of having committed crimes ... or betrayed their responsibilities'; in other words the Marshal was going to pay off old scores. To that end, from September 1940, Ministers of various Third Republic Governments were being rounded up by Pétain's police and interned in a mansion near Vichy. Reynaud, Daladier, Blum, and a large number of other politicians were to await their trials there. Furthermore, Alibert activated a law of July 1940, which condemned to death members of the armed forces who had left France between mid-May and the end of June of that year; civilians in that position were deprived of French nationality and had their property confiscated. Among others General de Gaulle, who in June 1940 had begun to organise a Free French movement from London, was condemned to death *in absentia* under this law.

During the summer of 1940 the situation in France had seriously worsened for the French, and the powers of the Vichy Government had considerably declined. The Germans, heedless of their promises, had not only annexed Alsace and Lorraine, but had also carried out a series of operations designed to prevent any kind of French recovery. They had pillaged the French treasury and French industry, and brought the Vichy Government to the point where it recognised that nothing was safe from them. Laval, on his own initiative, had tried to see members of Hitler's Administration. He was convinced that he could win them over to his own views of what Europe ought to be like. He thought that all he had to do was to offer them wholehearted French collaboration, including a declaration of war on Britain. But he had little success. When Pétain heard of Laval's efforts he was outraged. On the other hand, they encouraged him to seek a meeting with Hitler himself.

In fact, for the master of Germany, Pétain was at that time becoming a desirable interlocutor. Having failed, by September, to break Britain in the air, Hitler had decided to take Gibraltar and send his troops to conquer North and West Africa, and thus destroy Britain's vital links there. For this he needed French cooperation in their African territories. He might well have imagined, too, that recent attempts by the British and General de Gaulle to take over Dakar and the actual rallying of some African colonies to de Gaulle's Free French movement, would make a joint Franco-German

campaign against the dissidents an attractive proposition for Pétain. Since, furthermore, Vichy had recently also been forced to allow a virtual Japanese take-over in their Indochinese possessions, a French desire thus to reassert themselves might have seemed plausible. Hitler did not know that Pétain had already sounded out Franco, whose cooperation in German designs on Gibraltar would also have been necessary, and had been told that German transit through Spain would be resisted by all diplomatic means. This at least made it easier for Pétain, who was to see Hitler on his return from the latter's meeting with Franco, to play for time, or even to get some concessions on the false assumption that he would have helped if Franco had made Hitler's plan feasible.

Meanwhile, however, Laval continued to play his own game. Hitler agreed to meet him on his way to Spain, at Montoire, on 22 October 1940. Both men wanted a British defeat, and both – though for different reasons – wanted Franco-German collaboration to bring it about, as well as the reorganisation of Europe that was to follow it. At Montoire, Laval undertook to try to win over Pétain to a policy of close collaboration with Germany by the time the Marshal met Hitler two days later.

When the photographs of the Hitler-Pétain handshake were published and very widely distributed, there were many Frenchmen who were nonplussed. Even if the Marshal was playing a particularly clever game of apparent cooperation, did he have to go quite so far? This, and a radio appeal to the French to collaborate with the Germans, were the only visible results of the meeting, and they looked bad to those Frenchmen who still could not accustom themselves to being the friends of the country from which so much suffering had come to them for so long. But, concretely, the Marshal had given little away. He had not undertaken to make war on England; he had refused to commit himself even to defending French colonies against future British attacks. On the other hand he had obtained very little. The most important question, that of the over 1½ million French prisoners of war still in German hands, had only brought Hitler's agreement to look into it. If, as Pétain claimed, he had merely wanted the meeting to make contact, then it was successful. But only then.

Pétain was not, in any case, a man to burn his boats. At 84, he had preserved enough cunning to keep as many channels open as possible for the use they might be in serving the best interests of France as he saw them. While dealing with Hitler he was also secretly negotiating with Britain. Above all, he wanted Britain to

lift her blockade on metropolitan France. The Royal Navy, in trying to isolate France from her overseas possessions lest supplies from them found their way to Germany, was also damaging the Vichy economy. Churchill seemed prepared to agree to Pétain's request, and even undertake to restore France to her former position once Hitler was defeated, if the Marshal did nothing to help the Germans in any material way. But, given the situation in Europe, Pétain felt he had to come to some kind of understanding with the Germans. Britain's position in 1940 hardly suggested that she had any hope in the foreseeable future of doing much for France. Moreover, whatever Pétain might have thought of Britain's chances, the Laval faction was convinced that Germany would win the war and, accordingly, pressed for all-out collaboration with her in the hope that France might reap appropriate benefits.

In December 1940, Pétain dismissed Laval. He had been pressed to do so by most of his Ministers for some weeks but had hesitated because he knew that such a step would greatly displease the Germans. The principal objection to Laval had been his obsession with getting France to join Hitler in his war against England. Matters had come to a head in December when the Germans resuscitated their plan to launch a campaign in Africa against British possessions and, preferably, Gaullist-controlled French colonies. Laval and Pétain had adopted diametrically opposed attitudes to this project, and it was the ensuing clash that provided the occasion for Laval's dismissal. In fact, in the strange climate that reigned at Vichy, Laval was not only deprived of his office but also of his liberty; he was confined to his country mansion. At the same time, somewhat headily, Pétain had one of the most ardent French collaborators arrested in Paris itself.

As if this curious hardening of the Marshal's position had not been enough to put the Germans into a fury, Pétain declined, at the last minute, an invitation from Hitler to be present in Paris at the arrival and reinterment of the remains of the Duke of Reichstadt, which was to have been a demonstration of the new spirit of friendship between France and Germany. The German reaction to the Marshal's apparently new line was sharp. They broke off negotiations for the release of French prisoners of war and closed the demarcation line to all Ministers and officials, thus effectively preventing them from communicating directly with their representatives in the occupied zone; soon the closure applied to all men between 18 and 45. They then completely ignored Flandin, who replaced Laval.

In February 1941 Flandin felt constrained to resign. Admiral Darlan, who took his place and therefore became Pétain's heir-presumptive, had long ago decided on all necessary collaboration with the Germans, short of active military collaboration. On this basic point he agreed with the Marshal. But his detestation of Britain was no less than Laval's.

Darlan's term of office coincided with what turned out to be the beginning of the end of Hitler's Germany. With the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, and the entry into the war of the United States of America in December of that year, the conflict that had begun in September 1939 and had so quickly brought France to her knees was completely transformed. But for the French it meant no respite. On the contrary, increased German demands for food meant widespread undernourishment in France; increased British air capability meant French civilian victims through increased bombing; increased German need for raw materials meant that the French had to go short, even of coal; perhaps most appalling of all, increased German need for manpower led to the formation in France of French military units to fight in Russia by the side of the Germans, and the sending to Germany of hundreds of thousands of workers as 'volunteers' to help with German war production.

As German exactions grew, French resentment against the occupying power, coupled with the diminishing certainty of a Nazi victory, sent many Frenchmen overseas to join General de Gaulle's Free French Forces, while others helped to form resistance groups at home. But the efforts at active resistance led to harsh German retaliation, whose worst aspect was the execution of thousands of generally quite innocent hostages taken at random. During these great and swift changes in 1941, the Vichy Government progressively lost its grip on the country. Its overt impotence in face of German exigencies and its necessarily ambiguous public image had, in the course of that year, increasingly divorced it from the people. Furthermore, with the growth of the German terror the very notion of collaboration had become dirty. By 1942, when Pétain finally brought the captive Ministers of the Third Republic to trial at Riom, his case had become so patently unconvincing that the hearings had to be suspended on Hitler's personal demand.

But if, in 1941, the attitude of the French to Vichy and the Germans was beginning to change, the Pétain Government continued its efforts to palliate the effects of defeat through collaboration with Hitler. In the spring of 1941 Darlan agreed to give the Germans

transit facilities through Syria to help them with their plans to take Iraq from the British. In addition, he undertook to supply arms and instructors to the dissident Iraqis. In return for Vichy's assistance, the Germans released a number of prisoners of war and granted a few other concessions. It was a cheap price for French collaboration, particularly since Darlan also seemed prepared to be cooperative in other ways: for example, by allowing the Germans to use Bizerta, giving their armies transit through Tunisia on the way to Egypt, and instructing the French administration in North Africa to supply them with transport and guns. In the event, the Franco-German plans were upset by the invasion and occupation of Syria by British and Gaullist forces, and by Pétain's and Weygand's refusal to accept the results of Darlan's negotiations as they stood. If Darlan had evolved enough to be ready to face war with Britain, his colleagues still had not.

After Rommel's retreat in North Africa, and the American entry into the war at the end of 1941, the Germans tried once again to obtain French military collaboration. At that stage, however, Darlan had begun to wonder, as apparently Pétain had too, about the certainty of a German victory in what had become a world-wide war. He therefore returned to his former conviction that military collaboration had to be avoided at all costs, and rejoined the Marshal on the tightrope between limited collaboration and total subjection. As a proof of alleged French good faith, Weygand was deprived of his command in North Africa where he had incurred the anger of the Germans. But no other concrete French concessions were then made, and France received nothing at all in return. At that time, Pétain's plea to his people to help him face the rigours of his task momentarily earned him renewed popular support. He followed this with a series of direct refusals to specific German demands, including one for 150,000 French workers for German factories.

The Germans countered Vichy's show of resolution with an all-out campaign to obtain the return of Laval as Head of the Government. They backed their demand with the threat to appoint a Gauleiter if Pétain refused. By April 1942, the Marshal's necessarily vulnerable resistance had been overcome and Darlan was forced to resign. Laval and the Germans had their way. From then on Pétain could be no more than a figurehead, a cover for Laval's policies. And Darlan, though he remained heir-presumptive to the Marshal, could do little to affect Laval's actions.

In the months after Laval's return to power, doubts about Germany's ultimate victory began to look less like wishful thinking. In the autumn of 1942 a vast German army was halted and then totally defeated at Stalingrad. British air attacks on German targets were becoming massive and damaging. Rommel was suffering severe reverses in North Africa. The French were actually beginning to wonder when, not whether, Anglo-American forces would set foot in their country again. But, with Laval in power, the German need for greatly increased support, especially for their industries, was more likely to be met by France than before. Laval was to be the first French Minister actively to encourage his countrymen to go to work in Germany. When encouragement proved not to be enough the threat of deportation was used, both by him and the Germans, as well as that of the arrest of the families of those who refused to go. It was also Laval who allowed the Nazi treatment of the Jews to be extended to the Vichy zone.

Laval was not blind to the difficulties the Germans would encounter once they had to face up to the Americans as well as to the Russians. But he had thought out the implications of what he was doing. He could not conceive that the United States did not basically share his hatred of Bolshevism and that, at that level, the Americans could reach an understanding with Hitler. He saw himself as the man capable of arranging a compromise peace between the United States and Germany from which his country would emerge with renewed credit and status. Thereafter, Laval thought, the Germans would be allowed to finish their mission against Bolshevism in the east.

The Anglo-American landings in North Africa of November 1942, and German reactions to them, effectively ended Laval's hopes for a deal with Hitler. If the Germans had ever been tempted to believe that the French, apart from a few dedicated collaborators, could really be won over by them, the tales of French conspiracies in North Africa prior to the Allied landings must have finally disabused them. The fact that Darlan, who was by sheer chance in Algeria at the time, seemed to be going over to the Anglo-American side clinched matters. Abruptly, the Germans invaded the Vichy zone and occupied it, proceeding to exercise physical control where, for many months, they had already increasingly exercised political control. Pétain's attempt to impress upon Hitler that French forces were resisting the landings – which was in fact true – counted for nothing. Thereupon the French fleet at Toulon, fearing that it would

be seized by the Germans, scuttled itself in accordance with Darlan's promise to the British at the time of the 1940 armistice.

By the end of 1942, deprived of its African Empire and its fleet, its entire metropolitan territory occupied by the German Army, the Vichy Government had ceased to have any meaningful existence. It is not surprising that Frenchmen increasingly centred their hopes for the future on General de Gaulle and his now rapidly growing Free French movement. In the course of 1943 and 1944, political life in France was therefore of little interest to most people. Their attention, when they had the energy and leisure to divert it from the basic business of survival, tended to be concentrated on the growing terror and counter-terror practised by the enemy and Frenchmen alike. No one was safe, anybody could be somebody's scapegoat for something that could be dressed up as a worthy principle. When Hitler's defeat began to look inevitable – especially after the German retreat in the Ukraine in 1943, the Allied victory in Africa, and the invasion and surrender of Italy by the end of that year – the increasing activities of French resistance movements incited the Germans and many of their French supporters to ever more gruesome atrocities in which at times whole villages, taken at random, were sacked and their entire population massacred. In their turn, alleged or known French collaborators were threatened with death at the liberation, or murdered like their German friends in the name of resistance. Thus terror, and hunger, were the main features of the period between the end of the Vichy zone in 1942 and the liberation of France in the summer of 1944. Vastly increased Allied bombing of French targets made life harder still.

Although internal politics were of little interest to the average Frenchman during this period, the activities of French politicians became ever more frantic. Since the Germans were expected to be booted out of France by the Allies in the now not very distant future, personal reputations had to be refurbished in the light of the new situation, and arrangements had to be made for the government of the country after the liberation. Few of the politicians who had stayed behind in France after the armistice, whether they had actively collaborated with Vichy or merely retired into the background, or even spent their time in the Marshal's prisons, were looking forward to being governed by General de Gaulle. Some saw in his Algiers-based administration the precursor of a Communist take-over in France, largely because de Gaulle had the cooperation of the Communists who, after the German invasion of

the Soviet Union, had played a prominent part in the French resistance movements. Others saw in him a potential dictator, as Roosevelt did. And there were those who had voted full powers for Pétain in 1940, which had earned them Gaullist wrath and the promise of punishment. All of them were busy now. There was pressure on Pétain to make himself respectable by staging another coup against Laval. He was asked to reconvene the two Chambers of Parliament and to confront the Allies and de Gaulle with a ready-made administration that had some pretensions of being popularly based. After all, the results of the 1936 elections were still theoretically valid. Pétain did indeed try to get rid of Laval again, but German threats kept the Head of the Government in his position. He also tried to reconvene Parliament, but Hitler vetoed this too.

The Marshal was now 88 years old. The Germans distrusted him, particularly as they foresaw imminent Allied landings in France, and proceeded to isolate him even from his usual entourage. Then they began to shunt him around the countryside from château to château until, in the end, he was taken to Germany. Laval, typically, tried to find some way of influencing events in Paris while the Allied armies were already nearing the capital. He too was forced to make his way to Germany. For what it was worth, he resigned in the face of the German refusal to let his Government remain in Vichy, but quickly changed his mind.

Allied forces finally landed in Normandy in June 1944 and reached Paris at the end of August. Other Allied troops landed in Provence and advanced northward. General de Gaulle ignored Marshal Pétain's appeals for national unity and set up a Provisional Government in Paris. He acted as if the Vichy administration had never legally existed.