

## *New Hope For France*



**By F. C. Sta. Maria**

**F**OR THE first time in many years there was hope last month that France's chaotic political life might come to an orderly end. Of about 80 percent of the registered voters who went to the polls, 95 percent voted for the Constitution which will give the country the much needed political stability. The voting was a personal triumph for Premier Charles de Gaulle, who designed the new charter. But it was also a pattern for France's political future.

In a matter of months the nation which saw the downfall of several governments in dizzying succession, including that of the 4th Republic last May, will have a stronger president. And it is almost a certainty that Charles de Gaulle is going to be it.

The new Constitution is designed to correct the basic weaknesses of the French political system. It will give the country a stronger executive, which it had lacked. The chief

executive is elected for a term of seven years by an "electoral college" composed of 80,000 deputies, senators, and members of provincial and municipal councils. Thus, he is put into office not by direct popular vote but by what observers describe as a system that favors rural and conservative interests. As against the usual parliamentary concept of government, the president will be a stronger person at the expense of the premier.

Henceforth the president will have the power to: (1) negotiate and ratify treaties; (2) appoint and discharge premiers; (3) dissolve Parliament after "consultation" with the premier; (4) control appointments to civil and military posts; (5) sign ordinances and decrees; (6) suppress political parties which he believes are detrimental to national sovereignty and democracy; and

(7) assume dictatorial powers by simple proclamation if he decides that there is a state of national emergency.

These obviously are very broad powers unknown even to heads of such presidential types of governments as the United States and the Philippines. In the hands of an ambitious politician, such powers could easily make a dictator. It is significant therefore that the French people overwhelmingly bestowed upon de Gaulle such unlimited prerogatives. This political phenomenon can be explained in two ways, namely: (1) the French people realize the gravity of the present crisis and know that nothing short of a drastic change could save the nation; and (2) the French people have complete trust in de Gaulle.

**P**ARLIAMENT, under the new charter, is an emasculated body. It is permitted to meet twice a year for no more than three months at a time. It can pass laws but only in certain limited areas. Should a deputy accept a cabinet post or any other government position, he must resign from the Parliament. Whereas the premier is responsible to the assembly, the latter can force the premier, during its first year of existence, to resign on an absolute majority vote. After the first year the president can dissolve

an assembly and keep the premier while awaiting the outcome of new elections.

There is also under the new Constitution a powerful nine-man council which would have broadly the functions of the supreme court in the Philippines. This body is composed of three members appointed by the president, three appointed by the president of the assembly, and three by the senate president. It will determine the legality of certain acts passed by Parliament.

Indeed, there is bright hope that the 5th French Republic will have the stability which previous governments did not enjoy. Since the Revolution of 1789, France has been four times a republic, three times a monarchy, twice an empire and once a semi-dictatorship. The 4th Republic which was established in 1949 and which collapsed last May saw the successive failures of more than a dozen premiers; General de Gaulle was, in fact, the twentieth since 1947.

Under the old system there was a proliferation of political parties, with each candidate seldom, if ever, owing allegiance to any single party. Coalition and appeasement were the order of the day. Premiers had to be experts at compromise and at bringing together politically divergent elements. In

such a situation it was inevitable that a premier and his cabinet had a very uncertain tenure, which was subject to political vagaries and changes.

This was the condition which de Gaulle's Constitution seeks to remedy, if not entirely at least to a degree where a government could stay in power long enough to implement a workable program.

**O**NE PROBLEM which the next president of France has to solve is Algeria. While the results of the referendum in this revolt-torn colony sustained de Gaulle to an amazing degree (97% voted yes), there is no indication that France's top headache will be cured overnight. The North African rebels have proclaimed a provisional government with headquarters at Cairo. Under the banner of the Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) and the energetic leadership of Ferhat Abbas, the self-proclaimed premier, the nationalists have vowed to make Algeria free at any cost. In answer to de Gaulle's pleas for a "peace of brave men," the FLN has turned a cold shoulder. They are willing to negotiate, but in a neutral country, and not Paris as suggested by the French premier.

The Algerian problem cannot be minimized. It is of such a

magnitude as to make the difference between success and failure for de Gaulle's national program. Over 400,000 French troops have been forced to be kept in Algeria to fight the rebels. France is reputedly spending two and a half million dollars daily to fight the war. If the 5th Republic is to pursue successfully its plans of economic expansion and political stability at home, the expenditure in North Africa must stop, or at least be drastically reduced. France cannot afford both.

The Algerian nationalists know this for a fact, and thereby lies their strength. They are aware that de Gaulle must solve the Algerian problem first before he could succeed in continental France. The FLN also knows that a decisive victory is not necessary; by pursuing indefinitely a guerrilla warfare, it could succeed in sapping the Paris government of its economic, and possibly of its political, strength.

On his part, the French wartime hero who has made a spectacular comeback, showed an admirable mastery of the Algerian situation. Strengthened by his overwhelming victory at the polls, de Gaulle last month instituted stern measures calculated to control his own compatriots who have taken advantage of the confusion in the

colony. First to be disciplined were the military. He ordered General Raoul Salan, commander of French forces in Algeria, to: (1) get the generals and colonels out of Algeria politics; and (2) let the Moslems, including those advocating complete independence, to campaign freely for election.

**T**HE ORDER shocked Salan and many of the extreme right-wingers in the colony, who expected to be rewarded for their "loyalty." In fact, many of the soldier-politicians had rather expected to ride on de Gaulle's personal popularity to greater personal glory. They were disappointed.

Major General Jacques Massu, leader of the May revolt in Algiers, at first protested, then resigned as president of the Committee of Public Safety—the anti-rebellion organization. He was followed by 11 other officers. A planned general strike fizzled out at the last moment. Once more de Gaulle had asserted his supremacy.

Another ambitious politician, Information Minister Jacques Soustelle, who actually masterminded the Algerian revolt and who had hoped to become premier with de Gaulle's election as president, was likewise disappointed. The premier flatly refused to play partisan politics when he overruled efforts

to create a pro-de Gaulle party out of the fragments of the other political parties, and thus to assure his and de Gaulle's election.

Inducement held out to Algeria and, for that matter, the other French territories comes in the form of a provision under the new Constitution for greater political autonomy and the continuation of subsidy from the mother country. In the forthcoming election Moslems, who constitute nine-tenths of Algeria's population, will have a fair chance of representing the country in Paris. In previous years, the one million half-breeds of predominantly French descent wielded absolute political power over the rest of the population.

If, as planned by the new Charter the Moslems could get elected and consequently have a voice in the government of France, it is not unlikely that the Algerians would stop clamoring for outright independence. This possibility, plus the fact that they will continue to have economic ties with France and an aid of half a billion dollars annually, might turn the trick. This of course is only speculation; whether the rebels, who have lost 70,000 of their followers in the last three or four years of warfare would jump at the French bait, is another matter.

An encouraging sign was the release recently by the rebels of four French military prisoners and the freeing of 10 rebels by the French. If the elections, which are scheduled for November 28-30 should, as expected, see at least 47 Moslems deputies to the French assembly, the Algerian situation may yet prove to be less difficult than predicted.

**O**THER FRENCH territories had a similar chance to vote in last month's referendum to either stay within the French community or to quit. The only colony which gave a resounding vote of No to continued dependence upon France was the French Guinea in West Africa. This country thus automatically becomes an independent nation by repudiating de Gaulle.

Other French possessions — including Senegal, Niger and

French Somaliland — must choose to either remain as territories, become integrated as departments of France, or become federated republics. Madagascar chose to be such a republic within the French community.

The next two or three months will show some definite tendencies in France's new pattern of government. While the numerous economic problems will conceivably stay on, it is admitted by observers that there is a great promise for France under Charles de Gaulle. The Algerian problem must still be resolved. France's strained economy, with its dangerously sinking international reserves, would still have to be strengthened. But the future definitely seems brighter than either the past or the present. And much of the future is on the palm of de Gaulle's hand.—*Philippine Journal of Education*.

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### Plus and Minus

*The ever-increasing documentation of the United Nations has been expanded by yet another new document. It is a 5,700 word report by a committee which it set up to study the problem of how to cut down on the documents of the world organization.*

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