FRANCE, 1934–1970

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RICHARD VINEN

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To Giles Ockenden

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Abbreviations

AD	<i>Alliance Démocratique</i>
CFLN	<i>Comité Français de Libération Nationale</i>
CFTC	<i>Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens</i>
CGPF	<i>Confédération Générale du Patronat Français</i>
CGT	<i>Confédération Générale du Travail</i>
CGTU	<i>Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire</i>
CJP	<i>Centre des Jeunes Patrons</i>
CNIP	<i>Centre National des Indépendants et Paysans</i>
CNPF	<i>Conseil National du Patronat Français</i>
CNR	<i>Conseil National de la Résistance</i>
CRS	<i>Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité</i>
EDC	<i>European Defence Community</i>
EDF	<i>Electricité de France</i>
ENA	<i>Ecole Nationale d'Administration</i>
ENS	<i>Ecole Normale Supérieure</i>
FFI	<i>Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur</i>
FGDS	<i>Fédération de la Gauche Démocratique et Socialiste</i>
FLN	<i>Front de Libération Nationale</i>
FNSEA	<i>Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants Agricoles</i>
FO	<i>Force Ouvrière</i>
FR	<i>Fédération Républicaine</i>
FTP	<i>Franc-Tireurs et Partisans</i>
HLM	<i>Habitation à Loyer Modéré</i>
JAC	<i>Jeunesse Agricole Chrétienne</i>
MLN	<i>Mouvement de Libération Nationale</i>
MRP	<i>Mouvement Républicain Populaire</i>
MSR	<i>Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire</i>
NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>
OAS	<i>Organisation de l'Armée Secrète</i>
OCRPI	<i>Office Central de Répartition des Produits Industriels</i>
ORTF	<i>Office de la Radio-Télévision Française</i>
OS	<i>Organisation Secrète</i>
PCF	<i>Parti Communiste Français</i>
PPF	<i>Parti Populaire Français</i>

PRL	<i>Parti Républicain de la Liberté</i>
PSF	<i>Parti Social Français</i>
PSU	<i>Parti Socialiste Unifié</i>
RGR	<i>Rassemblement des Gauches Républicaines</i>
RNP	<i>Rassemblement National Populaire</i>
RPF	<i>Rassemblement du Peuple Français</i>
SAS	<i>Sections d'Administration Spéciaux</i>
SFIO	<i>Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière</i>
SOL	<i>Service d'Ordre Légionnaire</i>
STO	<i>Service du Travail Obligatoire</i>
UDCA	<i>Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans</i>
UDSR	<i>Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance</i>
UFF	<i>Union de Fraternité Française</i>
UNC	<i>Union Nationale des Combattants</i>
UNEF	<i>Union Nationale des Etudiants de France</i>
UNIR	<i>Union des Nationaux et Indépendants Républicains</i>
UNR	<i>Union pour la Nouvelle République</i>

Introduction

This book begins with a bang and ends with a whimper. The bang occurred on 6 February 1934 when fourteen of the demonstrators attacking parliament were shot dead by police. The whimper occurred on 9 November 1970 when de Gaulle, who had survived numerous assassination attempts, died peacefully at home. Between these two dates, France was transformed in three ways. Firstly, the level of political violence dropped. France was never as violent as, say, Weimar Germany, but throughout the period from 1934 until at least 1962 some Frenchmen believed that killing their fellow countrymen was a legitimate way to achieve their political ends. Furthermore, each act of violence fed off the memories of earlier acts: conflict in Vichy France was seen through the prism of events that had happened in the 1930s, or even earlier, and the dispute over *Algérie Française* was seen through the prism of Vichy. Some historians have argued that modern France has been in a state of virtual civil war. Charles de Gaulle, who rose against Vichy and was recalled to power to deal with Algeria, was a product of France's political violence. The mythology that surrounded his person was associated with a series of conflicts and many of his enemies came to believe that he encapsulated the wrongs that had been done to them. Indeed it might be argued that de Gaulle drew the poison of French animosities by focusing hatred, which had formerly been directed against whole groups of people, on one man. De Gaulle's departure from power was associated with the end of violence: his successor had been a non-combatant under Vichy who had appealed for amnesty after the Algerian war and who had sought to avoid bloodshed during the student riots of 1968. Since 1969 it has been inconceivable that a British cabinet should discuss, as it did in 1961, whether to send troops to support the French government against its own people, or that a French president should fly to Germany, as de Gaulle did in 1968, to check on the loyalty of the army before confronting rioters on the streets of Paris.

There are two other respects in which France was transformed between 1934 and 1970. In constitutional terms, the domination of

the legislature that had characterized French politics since the early Third Republic came to an end. France acquired a strong president, stable government, and more structured political parties. In economic terms, France in 1934 was a weak and declining power that was finding it particularly hard to escape from the consequences of the great depression; in 1970 she had experienced 'thirty glorious years' of growth and seemed poised to outstrip the economic growth of Germany and Japan.

This book attempts to describe and explain these changes, but it is not meant to be the first or the last word on the subject. Those who intend to read only one book on twentieth-century France should look elsewhere. I have neither tried to write a straight narrative account of events nor to write a comprehensive synthesis of all previous historical interpretations. Rather I have tried to write a series of interpretative essays on particular subjects. It might help readers to decide how to approach this book, and indeed whether to approach it all, if I outline what I believe to be the peculiarities of my own approach. Firstly, I have given particular attention to the centre and right of the political spectrum. This is partly because the right has been in power for most of the time between 1934 and 1970. It is also because I believe that historians, especially those from Britain and America, have been led astray by a fruitless search for a reformist or social democratic left that would correspond to their own political sympathies. In reality, the parties of the French left remained fixated on a Jacobin revolutionary past or a Bolshevik revolutionary future. If such parties worked within the capitalist system at all, they did so by suspending their revolutionary intentions altogether and becoming functional conservatives. The French right, on the other hand, has been influential precisely because of its lack of a clearly defined ideology: this made it flexible and innovative.

The second peculiarity of this book relates to Vichy France. Many historians regard much of post-war French history as an extension of the struggle between Pétainists and the Resistance. I believe that neither Vichy nor the Resistance attracted the active support of more than a small proportion of the population. Much of the impact of the Vichy period came from the general effects of war and occupation rather than the policies of the government. By contrast, I am more inclined than most historians to emphasize the importance for French society of departure from Algeria; indeed I would argue that the fact that this event attracted so little explicit discussion after 1962

is a sign that it had helped to bring about such transformations that all events before it came to seem irrelevant.

The third peculiarity of my approach relates to post-war economic growth. Most historians have emphasized the role of state planning in this growth, and some seem to believe that a small group of heroic individuals gathered around Jean Monnet managed to transform the French economy simply by the exercise of their will and intelligence. I am sceptical about such interpretations for two reasons. Firstly, state planning was not simply a technocratic instrument of economic management: it had political roots in the threat that the French bourgeoisie felt themselves to be under in the late 1940s. Secondly, the failure of other countries to imitate France's planning success and the failure of the French to sustain their economic success beyond the mid 1970s suggests that processes – such as immigration, technological change, and the development of consumerism – outside the control of government played a large part in economic growth.

Map 2 The Political Geography of France: areas where more than half of votes were cast for the right in 1936 are marked in black

Map 3 Vichy France