

*Ch. 6 - Politics And Administration In  
France: The Third Republic, 1920-40 And  
The Vichy State, 1940-44*



# Learning Intentions

In this section, you should understand:

- The problems faced by the Third Republic and efforts to resolve them in the inter-war years.
- The role of Vichy France in the war.
- Resistance and collaboration in Vichy France.

# *FR***FRANCE***AFTER* **WORLD** *WAR***WAR I** *1*

# The Impact of the First World War

France suffered greatly in the First World War (1914-18). Even though the country was on the winning side, the **impact** of the war was felt all during the inter-war years (1919-39) and beyond. Of the 8 million Frenchmen who fought in the war: 1.3 million died; 3 million were wounded; and about 1 million of the wounded were badly injured. Large areas of northern France were **destroyed** - factories, mines, towns and prosperous farming land. The cost of **reconstruction** was estimated at over 100 million francs. During the war, inflation rose by over 400 per cent and France owed a great deal of money which the country had borrowed to pay for the war.

## KEY CONCEPT INFLATION

**Inflation** is an increase in the prices of products, usually a large increase.

## KEY CONCEPT DEMOCRACY

**Democracy** is government by the people or elected representatives. There are regular elections with many different political parties. Decisions are usually arrived at by majority rule.



# Government and the Political System in France

France was a democratic republic with a parliament composed of a Chamber of Deputies and a Senate. But while all men had the vote, women were barred from voting. The country had a large number of political parties which were divided into **Left** (reforming or revolutionary), **Right** (conservative) and **Centre** (moderate). All governments in the inter-war period were **coalitions** (groups of parties).

There was a great deal of **political instability** as governments changed on average every six months when they lost the support of some sections of the coalition through disagreements over domestic or foreign policy. The electoral system caused some of the political instability in France. A small change in votes resulted in huge changes in the number of seats won in general elections. Victory for the right wing in one election was followed by victory for the left wing in the next election. In such a situation, governments sometimes had to resort to **rule by decree** to bring in laws.

# A New Government - the Bloc National

In November 1919, the **Bloc National** - a coalition of right-wing parties - won the general election. They succeeded because they favoured punishing Germany after the war and because of the fear of Communism after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The government was immediately faced with the problem of **industrial unrest**. In 1919, the previous government passed the **eight-hour working day** but demands for further improvements in working conditions and pay led to a **general strike** in May 1920. The increased militancy of the trade unions was due to a number of factors:

- Union membership of the **CGT**, the largest federation of trade unions, increased threefold during the war.
- Instead of wage increases driven by wartime inflation, there were **wage cuts** after the war.

But the Bloc National government reacted strongly to the general strike of May 1920. The government put it down ruthlessly; the leaders were arrested and when workers gave in at the end of May, 18,000 railwaymen were sacked. The CGT was split after the strike and union membership fell by almost 2 million.

# Socialist Divisions

The political party representing the workers - the Socialists - also divided. Some favoured closer ties with Russian Communism by joining the (Communist) **Third International** (or Comintern). The majority formed the **French Communist Party** (PCF) and followed instructions from Moscow, while the remainder led by Leon Blum favoured moderate socialism and they retained the name **Socialist Party**.



# Reconstruction

The Bloc National government began a programme of **reconstruction** in the war-torn areas of northern France which was completed by 1926. Roads and railways were repaired, factories were rebuilt with modern machinery, new houses were constructed and agricultural land was made productive again. One historian has written, *'The reconstruction of the devastated areas was the greatest economic achievement of postwar Europe.'* But, due to the effects of the First World War, the French economy suffered from a **shortage of manpower**. Two million immigrant workers who came from Italy, Spain, Belgium and Poland between 1920 and 1930 replaced this shortage.

The greatest difficulty facing the government was the **cost** of reconstruction. The French people, in particular the ruling class of industrialists and bankers, wanted the costs to be paid for out of German **reparations** (compensation). This was calculated at £6.6 billion, over 50 per cent of which was to be paid to France. French people wanted to ensure that this was paid so that Germany was kept weak and to gain revenge for German destruction during the war.

## KEY CONCEPT COMMUNISM

Communists believed that the working class would revolt against the middle class who controlled industry. This would result in a Communist society where private property was abolished, the government would run the land and the factories for the benefit of the people and everybody would be equal.



# The Cartel des Gauches

The Bloc National was replaced in the 1924 general election by the **Cartel des Gauches** (Coalition of the Left). This was an alliance or coalition of the Radicals and the Socialists, led by a Radical Prime Minister, **Edouard Herriot**. The Cartel des Gauches benefited in the election from:

- the failure of the Ruhr occupation,
- better party organisation.

Very soon the Cartel des Gauches faced a **financial crisis**, brought on partly by the Ruhr occupation. But the government also continued to borrow to pay for reconstruction and as the debt got larger, the value of the franc fell. French investors invested their money abroad to force the government not to tax the rich. When the government tried to take action, it collapsed in April 1925. Over the next year, six more Cartel des Gauches governments were formed but they all **failed** to solve the economic problems; the government had no money, the franc continued to decline in value and prices continued to rise.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What caused political instability in France in the 1920s and 1930s?
2. How did the Bloc National deal with the general strike?
3. How did they deal with reconstruction?
4. What was the problem of cost?



# Government of National Union

In 1926, the Cartel des Gauches government was replaced by a more conservative **Government of National Union** headed by **Raymond Poincaré** as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. He now took the decisions which the Cartel failed to take in 1924. He increased taxation for everybody, though more on the poor than on the rich, and he balanced the budget. He was helped by German reparations payments under the Dawes Plan. The franc was stabilised, investors grew confident and Poincaré was regarded as **the saviour of the franc**. Not surprisingly, the parties which supported him, including the Radicals, were returned to government after the 1928 general election. However, Poincaré had to retire the next year due to ill-health.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the Cartel des Gauches?
2. Why did it collapse?
3. How did the Government of National Union succeed?



# THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND ITS EFFECTS

# Economic Progress in the 1920s

In spite of political difficulties and many changes of government, the French economy prospered in the 1920s. Electricity, metal industries and chemicals made rapid progress, while older industries such as textiles, leather and food products also grew, though not as fast. Some industries were modernised. Car production, for example, imitated American-style mass production and the number of cars grew from 135,000 in 1920 to 1.8 million in 1939.

## KEY CONCEPT DEPRESSION

This term is used to describe when an economy is doing badly; industrial production declines, factories and businesses close and there is widespread unemployment.

## KEY CONCEPT PROTECTIONISM

**Protectionism** is the use of tariffs (taxes) to protect home industry and employment from foreign competition. This was the opposite of Free Trade.





# The Great Depression in France

Unlike other European countries, the **Wall Street Crash of 1929** did not affect France immediately. The economy was protected by high tariffs (taxes on imports), the Bank of France had huge reserves of money, French companies had borrowed very little and France did not depend on American loans. But the effect was only delayed until 1931. Once it hit, however, the **Great Depression** lasted longer in France than most other countries.

The Great Depression affected France in two main ways. **French exports** declined and the country had a huge **balance of payments deficit** (more imports than exports). French goods, especially luxury goods, were too expensive so production dropped and profits declined. The French tourist industry also suffered from falling numbers of visitors.

All sections of society were hit by the Depression; the farmers suffered from falling prices; wages fell and unemployment hit the workers; the middle and upper classes feared for the future.

# Government Policies

Governments of the Third Republic found it difficult to solve the economic problems. They followed traditional policies of cutting public (government) spending, usually by cutting the salaries of civil servants and the pensions of ex-soldiers. The governments introduced more **protectionism** as well. They also took over ownership or part ownership of some companies such as Air France and the railways. But the dissatisfaction of the social classes (the middle class, workers and peasants) and the pressure they put on the political parties made it difficult for governments to find solutions. This resulted in many changes of government and in criticism of the Third Republic.

# Cartel des Gauches Again in Power

Politics in the Third Republic was not immediately affected by the Depression. When Poincaré retired in 1929 due to ill-health, his government of National Union continued. He was succeeded briefly as Prime Minister by **Aristide Briand**, and then by **André Tardieu**. But as the Great Depression affected France by 1931 and 1932, the government failed to agree on economic policies. They lost popularity because they did not provide solutions for the economic problems.

Instead, a new left-wing **Cartel des Gauches** won the 1932 general election with 344 seats to the 259 seats of the right-wing parties. Once again the **Radicals**, led by **Herriot**, formed the government. But support from the Socialists collapsed when the government brought in a policy of cutting public spending to solve the economic problems. The very problems which brought them to power were now causing their undoing. But the government was faced not only with an economic and financial crisis: these were compounded by the rise of the right-wing leagues and, in foreign policy, with the threat to French security from the rise of Hitler.



# The Right-wing Leagues

A series of right-wing groups or leagues were formed largely in the 1920s and 1930s. These groups were **anti-parliament, anti-Communist, anti-Semitic and very nationalistic**. They had many Fascist traits or characteristics but they could hardly be regarded as Fascist. They had similarities to Mussolini's Blackshirts and Hitler's Brownshirts. They wore coloured shirts, jackboots, beat up people and called for the downfall of the Republic. They had the support of business and banking groups and they called for authoritarian government:

- The **oldest group** dated back to the late nineteenth century. This was the royalist **Action Française**. It drew its support from minor nobles, the professional classes, small businessmen and shopkeepers. Its younger members were mainly university students who **joined Camelots du Roi** for street brawls and protests.
- **Jeunesses Patriotes** (set up in 1924) favoured a stronger Presidency. It had a membership of about 90,000 and most of the support came from university students.
- **Solidarité Française** (1933) had similar beliefs. It was founded and financed by a rich perfume manufacturer and it proclaimed 'France for the French'.
- **Croix de Feu** (1927), formed for war veterans, was the strongest. It had a paramilitary style and it wanted to wipe out Communism and reform the Republic. One-third of its 60,000 members were in Paris.

The Leagues provided all the elements of propaganda, private army and terror which in Italy and Germany produced **Fascist revolutions**. The opportunity to exploit these conditions was provided by the **Stavisky Affair**.

# The Stavisky Affair

The Great Depression worsened in France, unemployment rose and a series of short-lived Cartel des Gauches governments - six during 1932-4 - failed to improve the economy. But economic problems were soon overshadowed by the **Stavisky Affair** (or Scandal) which did great damage to members of the Radical Party and also to the Third Republic.

## Theft and Fraud

Serge Stavisky, a Russian-born Jew, had been charged in 1927 with the theft of millions of francs. However, his trial was postponed 19 times over the next six years.

But his involvement in the Bayonne Affair - where he floated a loan of 200 million francs based on the false evaluation of the municipal pawnshop in Bayonne - led to his end. After the scheme collapsed in December 1933, he was wanted by the police. He went missing, but in January 1934 he shot himself.

### KEY CONCEPT FASCIST

Followers of Hitler or Mussolini.

### KEY CONCEPT ANTI-SEMITISM

**Anti-semitism** is the hatred for, and persecution of, the Jews. This hatred was based on religious and economic factors. Anti-Semitism became an important part of Nazi racial views which saw the Jews as an inferior race.

# The Stavisky Affair

## Corruption

It was soon clear that Stavisky had many friends in high places. The right wing went on the attack. They said that Stavisky had been murdered to hide the names of his friends in the police, politics and business. The right-wing groups - particularly those known as the **Leagues** - used the Affair to blame parliamentary democracy. They were supported by the right-wing press who worked to undermine confidence in the Third Republic. During January 1934, there was nightly rioting in Paris against the government, often ringing with the shouts of '*Down with the Robbers*' or '*Hang the Deputies*'.

The Prime Minister, **Chautemps**, attempted a cover-up. He refused to hold an inquiry, but he had to resign when it became known that the public prosecutor was his brother-in-law - the man responsible for the 19 postponements of Stavisky's earlier trial. It now seemed that the governments of the Third Republic were not just incompetent because they could not solve the economic crisis, but they were also corrupt.





# The Stavisky Affair

## Riots

When the new Prime Minister, **Edouard Daladier**, sacked the Prefect of Police, this resulted in a major street demonstration. On that day, 6 February 1934, a huge rally close to the Chamber of Deputies turned into rioting and a battle with the police. The rally and riots were largely organised and led by the Leagues, in particular **Action Française** and **Solidarité Française**. The strongest of the Leagues, **Croix de Feu**, was involved in the protest but did not participate as actively in the rioting. Fourteen rioters were killed and 236 wounded, and one policeman was killed and about 100 injured in six hours of rioting. The rioting led to the immediate **resignation of Daladier**. But it also resulted in a counter-strike a few days later organised by the left wing and trade unions to show that workers were prepared to defend the Republic.

# The Stavisky Affair

## Attempted Coup?

The **riots of 6 February** shocked republican politicians who saw this as an attempt to overthrow the Republic. A later Investigating Committee concluded, *'the Sixth of February was a revolt against Parliament, an attempt against the regime.'* However, the left wing greatly exaggerated the possibility of a Fascist takeover of France, similar to Italy and Germany:

- The groups were **not co-ordinated** and they **lacked a leader** like Hitler or Mussolini.
- Many of the groups had **small membership**.
- Unemployment was not as severe in France.
- Parliamentary democracy had a stronger tradition.

But the riots reflected serious dissatisfaction with the Third Republic and its failure to solve the economic, social and political problems.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was France affected by the Great Depression?
2. How did the French government deal with the Great Depression?
3. What were the Right-wing Leagues and how serious a threat were they?
4. What happened in the Stavisky Affair?



# The Popular Front Government

One effect of the riots of February 1934 and the rise of the Leagues was the together of left-wing parties; **the Socialists, Communists and the Radical Party**, to form the **Popular Front**. The main motivation came from the Communists who were ordered by Moscow to change policy - the rise of Nazism in Germany, and the failure of socialists and Communists to combine to stop Hitler, forced a change in Communist thinking. Now they wanted to **co-operate with other parties** to resist the rise of Fascism.

On Bastille Day, 14 July 1935, almost 400,000 people marched together in Paris and were addressed by the leaders of the three parties. In early 1936 they published a programme for government:

- They wanted **economic and social reform** and the **abolition** of the Leagues.
- In foreign policy they favoured **collective security** and the **League of Nations**.
- Their **slogan** was *'Bread, Peace and Liberty'* and they attacked *'the two hundred families'* who represented organised wealth in France.

The Popular Front won the 1936 general election with a clear majority of seats over the right-wing parties. The Socialists became the largest party and the Socialist leader, Léon Blum, became Prime Minister.

# Sit-in Strikes and the Matignon Agreement

The victory of the Popular Front raised the hopes of workers who expected the factories would be handed over to them. A spontaneous wave of **sit-in strikes** swept the country. As industry ground to a standstill, the new government was faced with its first serious problem. Blum called a conference of employers' representatives and the CGT (the trade union federation) in the **Hotel Matignon**, the official residence of the Prime Minister. Fear of widespread revolution forced the employers to make significant concessions in the **Matignon Agreement**:

- An **increase in wages** of about 12 per cent.
- The establishment of a **forty-hour working week** and **holidays with pay**.
- The **nationalisation** (government ownership) of the armaments industry and government control of the Bank of France.

For the moment both the workers and employers were pleased: the workers because they had made great gains and the employers because they had avoided a revolutionary situation.

## Pause in Reforms

But economic problems continued. The government borrowed to pay for the cost of some of its proposals and the franc lost value in relation to other currencies. This forced the government to **devalue the franc**. Even though this reduced export prices, inflation and unemployment remained high in France and industrial production stayed well below the 1929 level. In March 1937, Blum called a **pause** in the programme of reforms of the Popular Front government.

## Collapse of the Popular Front

Blum now proposed to use **decree laws** to bring in economic policies. But his proposals were turned down by the Senate and he resigned in June 1937. 'I have had enough,' he said. 'Everything I attempted to do has been blocked.' Further Popular Front governments, including another period with Blum as Prime Minister, failed to resolve France's difficulties. In April 1938, the Popular Front government finally collapsed and a conservative **Government of National Defence** headed by Edouard Daladier of the Radical Party replaced it.



# Government of National Defence

The new government suspended the reforms of the Popular Front and brought in economic policies favoured by the business classes. The government allowed some industries to break the 40-hour week and they cut government spending. This led to conflict with the trade unions. However, the government had a clear victory over the **CGT** who organised a **one-day strike** for November 1938. The government, encouraged by the right-wing press, organised troops and police, and intimidated public sector workers who were forced not to join the strike. After the strike, workers were fired and disciplined and the CGT lost members once again. The left wing was weakened even more.

# Problems Continue

By 1939, all the main problems that French society had suffered from in the inter-war years still remained.

**Population:** The loss of 1.3 million men in the First World War and the falling birth rate meant there was a shortage of labour and, by the end of the 1930s, soldiers. However, the use of migrant labour increased **social and political tensions**.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture stayed inefficient. It was protected by a system of tariffs so that farm prices were higher than elsewhere.

**Industry:** Industry also suffered from small-scale production. These small producers kept prices up and their large number prevented the implementation of social and economic reforms by the government. They were supported by richer financiers and industrialists.

**Summary:** Overall, France was economically backward with a great deal of class conflict. The biggest section of society was comprised of small producers, traders and farmers. The governments of the Third French Republic followed policies which suited their interests. They wanted low taxes and little social reform. This caused political instability which led to the many changes of government between 1920 and 1939. It also prevented the many improvements and reforms in French society which would have better prepared the country for the Second World War.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why was the Popular Front government formed?
2. What was their policy?
3. What caused sit-ins and strikes and how were they settled?
4. What other problems did France face in the 1930s?

# EXAM QUESTION

How and why was France faced with political instability in the 1920s and 1930s?



# FOREIGN POLICY



# French Security and the Peace Treaties

At the Paris Peace Conference (1919) after the First World War, **Clemenceau**, the French Prime Minister, tried to ensure the **security** and **safety** of France by demanding harsh measures on Germany. But Clemenceau failed in his demand that Germany should give up all land west of the Rhine River.

Many French people were therefore concerned that the Treaty did not provide enough security for France after all France had been invaded twice in 50 years by Germany. They had little confidence in the League of Nations. As well as this, American and British guarantees to help France in future wars against German aggression collapsed when the American Senate rejected the Treaty of Versailles. France felt betrayed.

# Protecting France

French foreign policy was guided by **French fear** of a revived Germany. The French army was the largest in Europe and there was no threat from the much-reduced German army but this still did not provide security. The government tried to provide greater security by two principal methods: (i) isolating Germany, and (ii) enforcing the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

## Isolating Germany

To provide better security, France made a series of **military treaties** which attempted to encircle Germany. By isolating Germany, France hoped to keep it weak. Treaties with Belgium (1920) and Poland (1921) began the encirclement. These were followed in 1924 with an alliance with Czechoslovakia, which linked France to the **Little Entente** of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania.

# French Occupation of the Ruhr

But also the French people wanted to enforce all the terms of the **Treaty of Versailles** on Germany. The question of **reparations** was the one which caused the most trouble during the 1920s.

**Poincaré**, a hard-line Prime Minister, believed firmly in the rightness of the French case. When Germany failed to pay some of the instalments due under reparations, Poincaré ordered a French army takeover of the **Ruhr**, the industrial heart of Germany (1923). The Ruhr occupation dragged on due to passive German resistance and French relations with Britain and America were embittered. In 1924, the Germans agreed to revised payments under the **Dawes Plan** and the French troops were withdrawn.

For many French people this was **not a satisfactory outcome**. In the first place, the occupation showed that France was not strong enough on its own to enforce the Treaty of Versailles. Secondly, the cost of sending in French troops resulted in increased taxation and the decline in the value of the franc. This contributed to the **defeat of Poincaré** and the **Bloc National** in the general election of 1924.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the foreign policy of the French government in the 1920s?
2. Why did France occupy the Ruhr?



# Briand and French Foreign Policy

In spite of many changes of government between 1925 and 1932, French foreign policy during this time was largely in the hands of one man, **Aristide Briand**. He realised that it was not possible for France to get support for forcing Germany to adhere to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. He also realised that he had to come to some agreement with Germany. He believed that by bringing Germany fully into the political and economic life of Europe, Germany would be so dependent on other European countries that she would not go to war with France again.

Briand was fortunate that the German Foreign Minister, **Gustav Stresemann**, also wanted European acceptance of Germany. In the **Locarno Pact** (1925), France and Germany, with British and Italian support, pledged to accept the borders established between them by the Treaty of Versailles. Germany was also invited to join the League of Nations. French people were delighted with the pact and Briand was given a hero's welcome when he returned to Paris.

The Locarno Pact was followed by the **Kellogg-Briand Pact** (1928). Briand and Kellogg, the US Secretary of State, agreed, along with 63 other countries, including Germany, to renounce the use of war as an instrument of national policy.

After these successes, Briand continued to work for better relations with Germany. The **Young Plan** (1929) further eased German reparation payments. In 1930, five years ahead of schedule, French troops left the Rhineland.

# Maginot Line

However, in spite of these improvements in Franco-German relations, the French still felt insecure. In 1929, they began the building of the **Maginot Line** - a huge line of fortifications along the German border. When it was completed in 1934, it gave the French a greater sense of security. But by that time also the Great Depression was affecting France, German reparations were cancelled in 1932, and Hitler became German Chancellor in January 1933.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the aims of French foreign policy under Briand?
2. How successful was Briand in foreign policy?
3. Why did the French build the Maginot Line?

# Foreign Policy in the 1930s

French foreign policy in the 1930s was still haunted by a feeling of insecurity. Their fear of Germany dictated their agreements and alliances. Initially, however, the arrival of Hitler to power in 1933 did not create any greater insecurity in France. Few French people realised how much Hitler hated France or the nature of Hitler's expansionist policies. Instead they believed his assurances of peace and his support for the Locarno Pact. Indeed, in 1934 France entered a **Four Power Pact** along with Britain, Italy and Germany to guarantee peace. Soon after the Four Power Pact a new foreign minister, **Louis Barthou**, changed the emphasis of French foreign policy. He maintained a firm line towards Germany and he believed that only an efficient **system of alliances** could protect France. He reinforced French ties with Poland and the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania). He also began talks with Italy and the Soviet Union.



# France and Italy

When Barthou was assassinated in 1934, his successor, Pierre Laval was more interested in an agreement with **Mussolini** in Italy. In 1935 he signed the **Rome Agreements** which ended differences between the two countries. Laval next agreed to the **Stresa Front** (1935) which brought Britain, Italy and France together. Their fear of Germany led them to reaffirm the Locarno Pact to contain Germany and guarantee the borders. France had maintained the isolation of Germany - but very soon French foreign policy was in ruins.

# Turning Points in French Foreign Policy

**The Invasion of Ethiopia:** Mussolini's invasion of **Ethiopia** (Abyssinia) in late 1935 had a major impact on French foreign policy. At the League of Nations, Laval had to agree with sanctions on Italy but he opposed British plans to include oil in the sanctions. He then privately persuaded the British Foreign Secretary, **Sir Samuel Hoare**, to agree that Ethiopia should be given to Italy. When news of the **Hoare-Laval Plan** leaked out it led to Hoare's resignation and, soon after, to Laval's also. The Stresa Front collapsed and the League of Nations was defeated. As one historian concluded, *'France was left alone to defend herself as best she could against a restless, aggressive Germany which very soon... would be stronger on land and in the air than she.'*

**Hitler breaks Versailles:** Hitler's breaches of the Treaty of Versailles clearly showed the **weakness** of French foreign policy. The French failed to act as Hitler introduced conscription, created the Luftwaffe and expanded the navy in agreement with the British. But the **greatest defeat** for French foreign policy occurred when Hitler took advantage of a rift between France and Britain, and a weak government in France, to **remilitarise the Rhineland** in 1936.

# Turning Points in French Foreign Policy

The French refused to act against Hitler on their own, partly because of a **defeatist attitude** in the army and in the right-wing press. The Minister of War expressed this view at a cabinet meeting, *'The Foreign Minister talks of entering the Rhineland... There are risks in this. The present state of the French army does not allow us to run risks.'* Instead they looked to Britain for support. But the British were following a **policy of appeasement** and allowed Hitler break the Treaty of Versailles in order to avoid a major war. France was now dependent on weak Eastern European countries and on ties with Britain.

**France and Britain:** France had to follow Britain's policy of appeasement even though it allowed Germany to get stronger:

- France needed Britain's resources for rearmament.
- France also needed the British army to fit into their war plan against Germany. The French army with the help of the British intended to block the Germans west of the Maginot Line.

Therefore, for the remainder of the 1930s, the French government made efforts to maintain good relations with Britain.

**The Spanish Civil War:** French foreign policy was next tested by **the Spanish Civil War** where a Popular Front republican government was attacked by a nationalist army backed by Germany and Italy. Blum, the leader of the French Popular Front government, opted for **non-intervention** in the war because of social and political divisions in France - the Right and Left were bitterly divided - and the need to maintain relations with Britain who also favoured non-intervention. Once again French foreign policy had failed.

# More Failures

By now French foreign policy was effectively tied to the British. Neither country made any serious protest when Hitler took over Austria in **Anschluss** (March 1938). But the biggest French sell-out came when Hitler demanded the **Sudetenland** from Czechoslovakia. The French Prime Minister, **Daladier**, attended the **Munich Conference** (September 1938) along with Hitler, Mussolini and Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister. Daladier signed the Munich Agreement which forced Czechoslovakia to hand over the Sudetenland to Germany in spite of French agreements with Czechoslovakia. **Daladier** was supported in this policy of appeasement by a majority of French people so as to avoid a European war. The right wing in particular looked on Hitler as less of a danger than Russian Communism.

# The Approach of War - Peace at All Costs

During 1939 the French government tried to avoid war at all costs. But France was now tied to Britain and British opinion was changing. After Hitler took over the rest of **Czechoslovakia** (March 1939), Britain gave a formal guarantee of help to Poland. France also agreed to follow Britain. The French and British tried to form a pact with Soviet Russia against Germany. But this was destroyed by the **Nazi-Soviet Pact** (August 1939). Even when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, the French still tried to break their commitments. However, they had no choice but to go along with Britain and both declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939.



# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How was each of the following a turning point in French foreign policy in the 1930s:
  - a. invasion of Ethiopia
  - b. Hitler breaks Versailles
  - c. the Spanish Civil War?
2. What part did France play in relation to the Munich Conference and Poland?

**WORLD WAR II - THE DEFEAT OF THE  
THIRD FRENCH REPUBLIC, MAY-JUNE  
MAY - 1940 1940**

# Why was France defeated?

Instead of uniting France against the German danger, the beginning of the Second World War divided the country further. Because of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, **French Communists** opposed the French war against Germany. They were directed by Moscow to denounce the war as an imperialist war. They also attempted to undermine French morale. On the other hand, the right wing developed a **peace party**, one of whose members was **Pierre Laval**, who favoured a separate peace with Germany.

# German Invasion

It was a divided France which faced the German blitzkrieg of May 1940. The Daladier government fell in March 1940 so a new government led by **Paul Reynaud** faced the German invasion. But the defeat of France was mainly due to **faulty military strategy** which could not cope with the German blitzkrieg tactics of speed and mobility. The French High Command still thought in terms of the First World War. On hearing of the German attack, they sent their best troops, along with the **British Expeditionary Force (BEF)**, into Belgium. They were easily cut off by the German tanks who raced across from the Ardennes and reached the English Channel in ten days.



# French Surrender

The government left Paris and eventually went to Bordeaux. **Reynaud** wanted to continue the fight in North Africa but the Army Commander and the cabinet were opposed to this so he was forced to resign. He was replaced by **Marshal Pétain**, hero of the First World War, who sued for peace. On 22 June, France signed an **armistice** with Germany in the same railway carriage in Compiègne in which Germany had surrendered in 1918:

- France was now divided into an **Occupied Zone** (northern and western France) and an **Unoccupied Zone** (southern or Vichy France).
- The French army was reduced to 100,000 men.
- France had to pay the cost of German occupation.

This was a humiliating end for the Third French Republic.

# EXAM QUESTION

Why was France defeated in 1940?

# Vichy France, 1940-44

The new French government was based in the town of **Vichy**. **Pétain** was head of government but **Laval** played a dominant role in the government. He got the Parliament to agree to abolish itself and the Third Republic. The Vichy government replaced the Third Republic with a **corporate state** similar to Mussolini's where the interests of the employers, workers and the State were represented. Pétain replaced Parliament with a **Veterans' League** of ex-soldiers. He also restored the influence of the Catholic Church to education and he protected the better-off classes. The Vichy government introduced **anti-Semitic laws** and rounded up Jews for deportation to Germany. Over 75,000 of these died in the Holocaust.

# Collaboration

Laval believed that Germany was going to win the war and he wanted France to adjust to the new order in Europe. In October 1940, Pétain and Laval met Hitler. Afterwards, Laval said, '*enter into the way of collaboration.*' In April 1942, he became Prime Minister. Laval continued to look for a role for France in the new Europe which he believed the Germans were creating. He wanted France to be the **favourite province of Germany**. Both he and Pétain thought that the only alternative to collaboration was direct Nazi rule.



# German Policy towards Vichy

But Vichy collaboration did not win greater respect from the Germans. Instead, Hitler looked on Vichy France as a cheap way of policing the area and as a source of raw materials and foodstuffs for the war. The Vichy government paid very large occupation costs. They also agreed to the conscription of French workers for the German war industry in return for the release of some French prisoners of war. Further, they put down the French Resistance which attacked supply routes to Germany. In November 1942, Vichy France lost most of the little power it had. On 11 November, Hitler ordered his army to take over Vichy France when American and British troops invaded North Africa and took over Vichy-controlled Morocco and Algeria. A Vichy government continued to exist in France until 1944, but only in name.

# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the Vichy government?
2. Why did the Vichy government collaborate with Germany?
3. How did they collaborate?

# French Resistance

While those in charge of Vichy collaborated with Germany, a French Resistance movement opposed German occupation in many different ways: collection of military intelligence; helping British airmen to escape; distribution of anti-German leaflets; boycotting Germans in public or in bars; sabotage of railways or guerrilla attacks on German soldiers. German treatment of those who were caught was ruthless; they were arrested, tortured and often executed. Sometimes there were even mass executions as in the town of **Oradour-sur-Glane** where 642 men, women and children were massacred.

## KEY CONCEPT RESISTANCE

This was the act of resisting when enemy troops have taken over the country. The Resistance was usually a secret, or underground, organisation involved in sabotage against the occupying forces and collaborators.

# Resistance Grows

In the early months of the German occupation, Resistance was sporadic, usually carried out by small groups. But gradually groups such as **Combat**, **Franc-Tireur**, **Liberation Nord** and **Front National** developed. The Resistance got a huge boost in June 1941 when Hitler invaded Soviet Russia. Then the **French Communists**, who up to this had been neutral towards Germany, became the most active leaders of the Resistance. A further boost to the Resistance came when French workers were being conscripted to work in German war industries. This enlarged the Resistance as many of the young men took to the hills and forests.



# Co-ordination of Resistance

As the war progressed there was greater co-ordination between the Resistance groups. Eventually, the leadership of the French Resistance was taken over by **General Charles de Gaulle**. In 1940, on the fall of France, de Gaulle escaped to London where he set up the **Free French**. He wanted all patriotic Frenchmen to join him. However, he struggled to receive recognition from **Churchill** and the British who found him difficult to deal with. The **Americans** were even more hostile and accepted Vichy France as the legitimate French government. Instead, de Gaulle was able to create unity among the many resistance groups through his representative, **Jean Moulin**, who was parachuted into France. He first created links between the northern and southern resistance groups. Then he persuaded the Communists to accept de Gaulle as a replacement for Pétain when liberation came.

# De Gaulle Takes Over

The Americans saw little role for the Resistance as they planned the Normandy landings (1944). However, the Resistance increased their attacks but very often at the expense of huge reprisals by the Germans. When Paris was liberated in August 1944, American troops were accompanied by French troops as they took over the city. De Gaulle ensured that he was recognised by all as leader of France when he led a triumphal march from the Arc de Triomphe to Notre Dame.

# Revenge on Collaborators

After the Liberation, the Resistance took revenge on the collaborators. About 9,000 were executed without trial and there was a danger these executions would get out of control. But de Gaulle's government began the **systematic punishment** of the collaborators. They arrested and tried 125,000 people over the next two years; about 90,000 were punished, about half of these were imprisoned, and 767 were executed after trial. Some of these included the leaders of Vichy France including **Laval**, but **Pétain's** death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. By taking control of the punishment of the collaborators, de Gaulle's government contained the violence and established the authority of the State.



# Assessment of Resistance

Overall, the numbers involved in the Resistance were relatively small - about 2 per cent of the adult French population. However, the Resistance played a major role in boosting French morale. It helped wipe out the memory of Vichy collaboration. Even though the military impact of Resistance was small, it kept alive the hope that Germany would be defeated.



# REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What actions did the French Resistance undertake?
2. Who organised the resistance?
3. Was it successful?
4. What happened to collaborators after the war?