

The Agony of France

The Agony of France

By

Andrew Sangster

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



The Agony of France

By Andrew Sangster

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2016 by Andrew Sangster

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9438-9

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9438-8

*This work is dedicated to my wife Carol,
for her guidance,
and above all for her patience.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	xv
General Preface	xvi
Acknowledgements	xix
A-Z Portraits of Main Figures	xx
Map of Divided France.....	xxiv
Part One: Why the Fall of France?	
Preface to Part One.....	1
Chapter One.....	2
<i>Vox Populi</i>	
Introduction	
Chapter Two	5
Decadence	
Political Decadence	
Fragmentation & Division	
Fear	
Rhineland, March 1936	
France not alone in Problems	
Appeasement	
Scapegoats	
Blum & Popular Front	
Communists	
Daladier	
Reynard	

Chapter Three	23
Traumatised and Xenophobic	
Memory	
Pacifism	
Fear	
Xenophobia and the 5 th Column	
Panic of Flight	
Chapter Four	34
Economics and Alliances	
Introduction	
Economics	
Nature of Alliances	
<i>Petite Entente</i>	
Italy	
Spain	
Belgium	
Russia	
Britain	
USA	
Summary	
Chapter Five	51
British Support	
Franco-Phobia and Anglo-Phobia	
Mutual Distrust	
Military Contribution	
Chapter Six	57
Morale of French Forces	
Army	
Naval and Air Power	
Chapter Seven.....	68
Senior Command, Blitzkrieg and Strategy	
Blitzkrieg	
French Strategy	
Chapter Eight.....	77
High Profile Individuals	
Introduction	
Politicians above Military	
Gamelin-Weygand	

Chapter Nine.....	85
The German War Machine	
Germany Post WW1	
Germany Restructured	
Hitler's Determination and his Plots	
Innovations	
Motivation & Professionalism	

Chapter Ten.....	94
Summary and Conclusions	
Decadence of Political Body & Scapegoats	
State of French Society	
Economics and Alliances	
The British Contribution	
Morale of French Forces	
Senior Command, Blitzkrieg & Strategy	
High Profile Individuals	
The German War Machine	

Part Two: Occupied France

Preface: Historiography and Memory	103
--	-----

Chapter One.....	109
End of Third Republic	
Introduction	
The Armistice & Ramifications	
Demise of The Third Republic	
An African Alternative	

Chapter Two.....	124
Political Vichy	
Raison d'être of Vichy	
Political Collaboration	
Rise of Laval	
Montoire	
Laval Sacked	
Flandin's Moment	
Darlan	
Laval in Exile	
Laval's Return	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allied Success and Consequences Trouble in Vichy <i>Relève</i> and STO Laval Talks to Hitler Again Pétain Tries to Oust Laval Again End Game End Comments on Political Vichy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Vichy and Britain</i> <i>Philippe Pétain</i> <i>Pierre Laval</i> <i>Vichy the only Collaborating State?</i> 	
Chapter Three	176
Restoration as France Burns	
Introduction	
Family	
Youth	
The Classroom	
The Peasant, Businessman and Artisan	
Restoring France by Exclusion	
Civil Control	
Hostage Question	
The Legion and its Transformations	
Policing, Prefects and Judiciary	
Anti-Semitic Policing	
Chapter Four	205
Living in France	
Introduction	
The Men	
The Women	
Young People	
Living alongside the Occupier	
Day to Day Survival	
Intellectual Response	
Chapter Five	227
Collaborationism	
Introduction	
Background of Collaborationism	
Vichy's Position	

French Waffen-SS	
Denunciation	
Profiteers	
Individual Impact	
Marcel Doriot	
Jacques Déat	
Robert Brasillach	
Lucien Rebatet	
Intellectual Collaborationism	
Chapter Six	244
The Church in France	
Background and General Issues	
Earlier History of Church in France	
Protestant Denomination	
Church Political Leanings	
Pius XII	
Vichy and Vatican	
French Church Attitudes to Vichy	
Church and Education	
Ordinary Clergy	
Church and the Allies	
Church and the Occupiers	
Church and Resistance	
Postwar	
Chapter Seven.....	273
Anti-Semitism	
Introduction	
Why Jews?	
Jews in France	
Vichy's Part	
Anti-Semitic Legislation	
The Camps and Deportation	
The Census	
Aryanisation	
Economic Aryanisation	
“Jewishness” and Persecution	
The Jews	
Resisting	
French Society	
Final Thoughts	

Part Three: Resistance in France

Preface	309
Chapter One.....	312
Introduction	
French Attitudes	
Why Resist?	
The Word Resistance	
Chapter Two.....	318
De Gaulle	
The Man	
In the Beginning	
Suspicion from the Start	
Early Developments	
Friction	
De Gaulle's Tenuous Position	
De Gaulle Starts to Win Through	
Chapter Three.....	331
First Home Resistance	
Symbols	
Attitudes to Resistance	
Individual Response	
Tradecraft and Betrayal	
The First Groups	
Chapter Four.....	339
Clandestine Press	
Introduction	
Nature of the Hidden Press	
Impact	
Chapter Five.....	343
Zonal Differences	
Background	
Different Methods	

Chapter Six.....	346
Political Parties and Communists	
Introduction	
Communists in a Corner	
Communists Start their Resistance	
Consequences	
Communist Activity Spreads	
Need for Unity	
Fear of Communism	
Chapter Seven.....	356
Resistance Finding its Identity	
Introduction	
Emerging Leaders	
Moulin Begins Mission of Unity	
Issues of Allegiance	
Chapter Eight.....	362
The Struggles of Resistance	
Friction and the Call for More Unity	
Unity with Problems	
Moulin's Input	
German Reaction	
Chapter Nine.....	367
Complexity of Resistance	
Occupation of the South	
Leadership of the Resistance	
Problems for the Resistance	
Chapter Ten	373
Disasters and Victories	
Introduction	
The Vacuum after Moulin	
De Gaulle attempts Leadership	
Forms of Resistance & Role of Women	

Chapter Eleven	380
<i>Maquis</i>	
Introduction	
Taking Shape	
Almost Civil War	
Public Response, Resources and Anarchy	
Armed Struggle	
Maquis attract Allied Attention	
Pre-Invasion	
Chapter Twelve	392
Invasion	
End Days	
Post-Invasion	
Paris Insurrection	
Chapter Thirteen	405
<i>Épuration</i> , Postwar and Conclusions	
<i>Épuration</i>	
Immediate Postwar	
Conclusions and Myths	
Appendix A	420
Abbreviations	
Appendix B.....	422
Chronology	
Appendix C.....	432
Dramatis Personæ	
Notes.....	446
Bibliography of Cited Works	474
Index.....	483

FOREWORD

As a valedictory note at the end of his autobiography (*Captain Professor*, published 2006), Sir Michael Howard quotes Immanuel Kant “*Nature does not seem to have been concerned with seeing that man should live agreeably, but that he should work his way onward to make himself by his own conduct worthy of life and well-being.*” Sir Michael after a lifetime of studying history decided to conclude with this line from Kant, and its veracity is crystal clear. Kant arrived at this conclusion some two hundred years ago, and it appears as one of those eternal truths applicable to all times.

War is wrong, and nearly always leads to inhumanity and evil, and as such demands the attention of all thinking people, not least historians. Kant’s insight applies to all nations, ideologies, to the whole of humanity. History is not moral philosophy, but the essence of moral philosophy is embedded within the structure, intentionally or otherwise. In studying the forces at work within France, especially the Vichy State, Kant’s statement that man *should work his way onward to make himself by his own conduct worthy of life and well-being*, ought to be kept in the forefront of the analytical mind.

GENERAL PREFACE

When I read the French historian Henry Rousso's reply to the question as to whether he wished to become an agitator of collective memory, his reply rang bells with me, namely his point that the recent past is presented today with unequalled intensity, and is receiving unprecedented attention because of our difficulties in facing up to the tragedies of the Twentieth Century. This is true of all the combatant nations, and applies especially to the cruelty of the last war, particularly in France with its various traumatic experiences of a past which is still being analysed to this day.

There are many reliable histories of the Defeat of France, its Occupation and the Resistance, and I make no excuses for using them widely. Some carry considerable workmanlike detail and are extensive. This is why I have tried to produce a work which encapsulates the latest scholarship in a small readable volume, which the general reader and the student of history will find useful. Sometimes the professional historian writes so much that the welter of information can be overwhelming if not confusing; this book is an effort to provide an everyman's guide, which will appeal to both the student historian and the generally interested reader.

For this reason, by trying to highlight the main threads of the subject, I have used a thematic scheme based in three distinctive parts, and have kept it as succinct as possible. The book may be read from cover to cover, but with the thematic format it is possible by looking at the contents page to go straight to a specific issue. For example, in Part One dealing with Defeat the reader might want to look for the question of pre-war allies; in Part Two on the Occupation, the action of the Church in Vichy, and in Part Three it may be the Communist input in the Resistance; this system allows for easy referencing. To help the reader there is a detailed chronology in the appendices, and a *Dramatis Personæ* list of the important names which emerge, as well as some photographic portraits of the main figures. The *Dramatis Personæ* factor has the double advantage for the curious, because it informs the reader by this brief portrayal of their life what happened to the individual.

The set-back in writing a book in a thematic way rather than as a strict chronological sequence is the problem that it can lead to repetition in its allusions, and sometimes events. A person already mentioned or an event

already alluded to several times may have to surface again and again because of different contexts, and sometimes to remind us of the importance of the point in question. Some may find this frustrating while others may think it useful; my hope is that it works for the reader as it has for me in clarifying my views.

On a personal note I must make the observation that over the years I have studied this particular period of French history I have changed my mind many times. Initially, as a typical Anglo-Saxon I wondered at the Defeat of France, found Collaboration difficult to comprehend, and was somewhat cynical about the limited size of the Resistance. In addition to this I was sceptical about the reasons and value of the Maquis, found it difficult to grasp the nature of the postwar recriminations, known as the *épuration*, and felt almost angry about the myths which were constructed postwar. As my reading and analysis progressed I had many changes of mind on all these issues.

If France 1939-45 is a complex period for study it was also confusing for the French at that time. In the defeat there were so many strands of possible explanations it really became a matter of trying to establish the priorities. I kept asking myself the question as to how, as a family man, I would have reacted, and perhaps in the collaborating Vichy I may have found the obvious answer. I also suffered severe doubts over the hated Laval, in his own words it struck me he was not so much a “war criminal as a peace criminal;” contentious I know, but it often crossed my mind. As a priest of nearly fifty years, I was curious about the reactions of the Church in France to the Occupation, and once again it dawned on me that the parish priest, closer to the reality of everyday life, often showed more insight than their ecclesiastical masters. The difficult issue of anti-Semitism struck me as an issue almost beyond redemption, even given the circumstances of the day. When the argument is put forward that once even slavery was seen as commercially acceptable in given periods of history, even by the Church that still does not give it justification. In reading about the Resistance I forced myself to repeat the question, what would I have done? The outcome was a growing admiration for those who did resist, and a sympathy with the fractious internal divisions from which they suffered. Understanding the *épuration* was not easy, but a historian has to try and stand apart and look at the emotions of the day; this approach at least threw some light on what was otherwise in many incidents an appalling situation. I have to confess I was never appreciative of de Gaulle, but even in this instance I experienced a growing sympathy with this leader. Although I had serious misgivings about his myth building from the minute he arrived in England in 1940, I now have a high

degree of sympathy for his foresight. In the latter pages of the book I try and illustrate that all countries, including Britain and Germany need national myths.

In writing this book I was forever conscious of the French historian, Henry Rousso in his book *The Haunting Past, History, Memory and Justice in Contemporary France*, (p.9) who wrote that history is like memory, and is a way to build a bridge between the past and the present, and the future as well, but noting that even scholarly, and in particular national histories, are not without social and identity functions. I have done my very best to bear this in mind as I have written and rechecked this text. Chateaubriand in 1807 wrote that historians can act as bearers of the “vengeance of nations;” I am not a prosecutor historian, as I am more inclined to the defence, but above all I need to look at the past in order to discard any form of national bias.

On completing this book the reader may also have a change of mind, or thoroughly disagree with me, but it is a complex period and still wide-open to investigation. One thing I am sure everyone will agree with is that France was traumatised and suffered, thus the title *The Agony of France*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am highly indebted to all the scholars and authors whose books and articles are cited in the Bibliography, whose work I have studied and plundered with pleasure, sometimes critically sometimes with applause. I am grateful to the Rev Canon Dr Jeremy Haselock, the Rev Canon Dr Peter Doll and the Rev Canon Simon Wright for their observations on the highly complex and sensitive chapter dealing with the Church in France.

I am also appreciative for my sister Yvonne ploughing her way through the text looking for “typo” errors; a task I abhor.

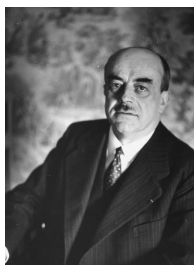
Above all I am most grateful to my wife, Carol Ann who has patiently read through the text with me, assisting in the grammar, making my style of writing more readable, challenging my use of some words and phraseology, noting any repetitions. Her common sense has been invaluable as has her patience while I have spent nearly three years only interested in putting this work together, even on holiday. Even these holidays have been spent in France.

As such I dedicate this work to her with all my love.

A-Z PORTRAITS OF MAIN FIGURES



ABETZ



ALIBERT



BLUM



BOUSQUET WITH LAVAL



BRASILACH



BROSSOLETTE



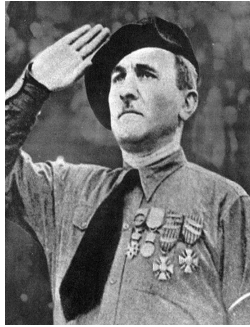
DALADIER



DARLAN



DANNECKER



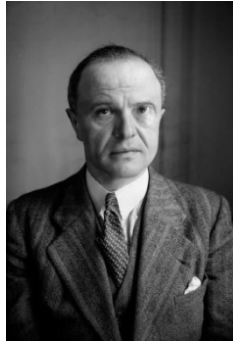
DARNAND



D'ASTIER



DE GAULLE



DE PELLEPOIX



D  AT



DELONCLE



DORIOT



FLANDIN



FRENEY



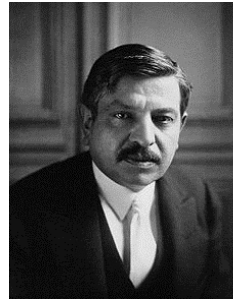
GAMELIN



GERLIER



GIRAUD



LAVAL



PÉTAIN WITH MENÉTREL



MOULIN



PÉTAIN



PUCHEU



REBATET



REYNAUD



SALIÈGE



SAUCKEL



SUHARD

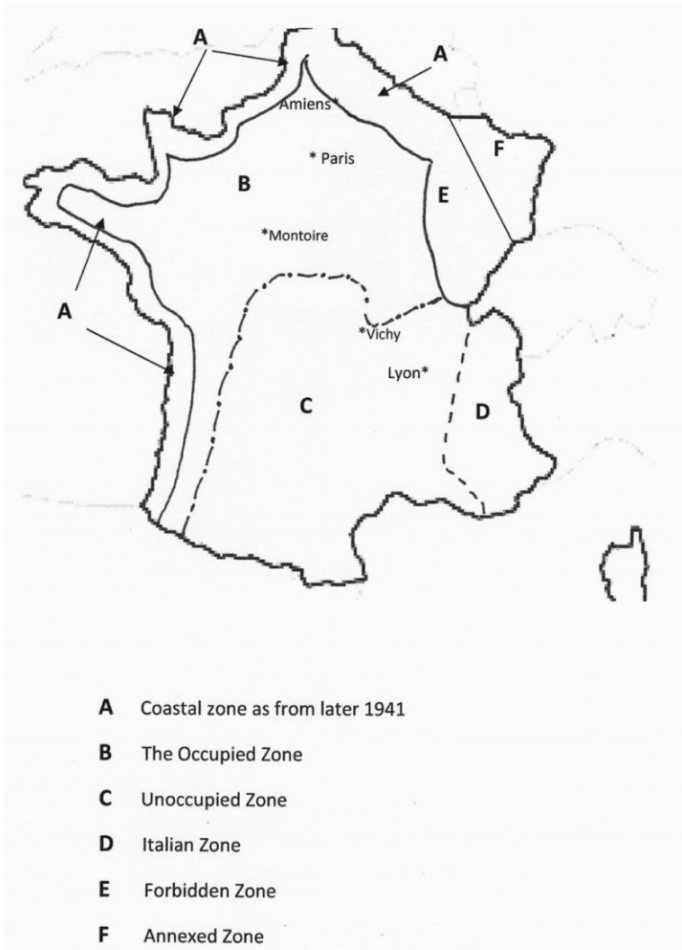


VILDÉ



WEYGAND

DIVIDED FRANCE



PART ONE

WHY THE FALL OF FRANCE?

PREFACE TO PART ONE

Alistair Horne's history of the Defeat of France, *To Lose a Battle* is old but remains a reliable history of what happened during the defeat. There are many military histories available, but in the overall theme of this study I do not intend to concentrate on what happened, but why the defeat occurred. I have looked at all the main themes and tried to reach some conclusions. Over the years various views have tended to dominate and then fade, many to re-emerge, as others became overshadowed with yet more viewpoints. The dominance of the theory of the political collapse, breakdown of alliances, social attitudes, disintegration of society, military defeat have all had their historical enthusiasts, but there is much truth, in my opinion, that all these factors are like an intricate tapestry, where all the colours are needed, but some are more vibrant and significant than others.

CHAPTER ONE

VOX POPULI

Introduction

At a professional historical level the Fall of France and its consequences have been placed under considerable scrutiny. Seventy-five years after the event when asking people who would be considered well-read as to why France fell, there were a few who felt the Maginot Line mentality had not worked against a mobile German machine, and a few who felt that the Third Republic was too divided. Quite a few suggested that France was decadent and the roots of defeat can be established by this factor alone. Others placed the blame at the feet of French politics and some politicians, appeasers like Flandin, peace and co-operators such as Laval, but especially Blum, Daladier and Reynaud who wielded the power. This would not be incompatible with findings in some history books.

The French historian Rousso studied public opinion in 1980, and noted that “when asked about the causes of the debacle, 56% blamed the Third Republic for leaving France militarily unprepared; 31% cite the incompetence of the generals; 20% mention a defeatist spirit; and 15% blame a fifth column....on the whole, 10% rated the armistice a very good thing and 53% called it a good thing.”¹ This may have changed over the years, but there are still some serious contentious issues over the reasons for the defeat; and no one appeared to mention the German war machine.

Amongst those who are less interested in history, though still holding opinions, there were ideas that the French simply ran away, that the Germans had a brilliant military machine; that the French are more at home in the café and the theatre, and when “we” (the British) did save some French at the “victory” of Dunkirk most of the French wanted to be repatriated. Even the popular historian Hastings wrote that “very few Frenchmen in 1940 and afterwards followed the example set by tens of thousands of Poles fighting on in Exile, even after their country had been defeated.”²

Little of this corresponded with the *vox populi* of French counterparts who were more inclined to suggest that *Les Anglais* were not true allies, that the Germans were *militaristic Prussian* to the core. Those French people who were asked were more aware of particular individuals whom they blamed in this order; Daladier, Blum, Gamelin, Weygand, Laval, Pétain, Reynaud, Chamberlain and Churchill. Amongst many French and some British popular attitudes was the feeling that France was not “itself” during this particular period. This is reflected in the diary of the intellectual German Dresden Jew Klemperer, who wrote, having read in the German press about France “When will I ever hear about the other France.”³

There is a widespread opinion in France that it was Britain who led France into war: “apologists for France’s eclipse have consistently pointed to perfidious Albion...the English governess, bullying and cajoling her French charges....” along the road to war.⁴ This theme has its own history; even in 1938 the French Ambassador to Moscow, Robert Coulondre, claimed that after the *Anschluss* Chamberlain “took over the reins of the Franco-British team and guided it towards war.”⁵

Many general readers and some historians view Munich, where Chamberlain was accompanied by Daladier as a crucial moment when a cowardly response from the French and British brought nothing but derision. Yet it was only France and Britain which actually declared war on Hitler’s tyranny, both America and Russia kept a safe distance until they were attacked. It has been suggested that the British and French leaders led Hitler into a diplomatic trap. Hitler wanted to seize the whole of Czechoslovakia, but used the German population of Sudeten as his pretext, only to find the French and British agreed: “the German dictator was dumbfounded.”⁶ Had France and Britain declared war at this stage the response from the commonwealth and America would not have been supportive; Canada for one declared it would stay neutral. It must be recalled that at the first British victory at El Alamein, the majority of the troops came from the Commonwealth; Britain’s overseas support was critical.

These are extremely complex questions, and as history has opened the files and developed different approaches it has become even more intricate. Armed conflict has always been the *ultima ratio* of international politics, but traditional political history has been challenged by socio-economic history and social science. It has been a characteristic of historical research that such thematic changes have thrown new light onto the events of the past, but it can also be confusing for the general reader. There are such headings as the “Functionalist theory” in which it can be

argued that Germany was driven to war by excruciating domestic, economic and political pressures. There is the “Intentionalist theory” that Hitler, ideologically driven, deliberately provoked the war. As usual in such debates the truth is elusive, but this study will avoid academic jargon, and try to address the problems directly.

This exploration will not be a day-by-day account of the events leading up to and including 1940, this is best read in Alistair Horne’s dated but very full history, and more recently in Julian Jackson’s 2003 publication.⁷ There are a myriad of other studies, many of which will be referred to in the footnotes and bibliography, but this exploration will examine different but not unrelated reasons as to what has been described as “one of the great military catastrophes in world history,” and as General Ironside remarked in his diary “the *greatest* military disaster in all history.”⁸ This study will act like a sieve, sorting out the most popular theories relating to the collapse of France as objectively as possible, and try to ascertain their reality in the search for some illumination. One thing is certain, the Defeat of France was more than a military history disaster, because “the fall of France turned European conflict into world war and helped reshape international politics in patterns that endured for nearly half a century, until the momentous events of 1989,” when the Berlin Wall fell.⁹ Jackson noted that “there are many strands to the fall of France: it was a military defeat, the collapse of a political system, the breakdown of an alliance between two countries, and in its final stages, almost the complete disintegration of a society.”¹⁰ How to give these different strands a priority of relevance remains a conundrum, but it is important to do so because the Defeat of France in 1940 was in many ways the fulcrum of the Twentieth Century; the pivotal point that still has ramifications to this day.

CHAPTER TWO

DECADENCE

Political Decadence

The historian Alexander Werth wrote that “what makes French history fascinating is that the country is, more than any other, in a constant ferment of ideas. Maurrasism, Liberalism, Socialism, Communism, Burnhamism, Existentialism, and the numerous schools of Catholic thought.”¹¹ This also underlines the multifarious divisions in French thinking, and also points to the possible lack of any sense of cohesion within their body politic.

Many historians have used the term “decadence” in referring to the period of French history between 1920 and 1940. This probably originated in Pétain’s efforts immediately following the Armistice to avoid any blame resting on Weygand and the Generals, by casting the accusation of blame against chosen politicians.¹² This accusation was also used to a certain extent by the Fourth and Fifth Republics as a source for their own justification. The defeat had been on such a “monumental scale it invited a comparably grand explanation of this paradigm of decadence. On this view, the Third Republic had been rotten to the core. The civilian and military leadership...were products of this endemic moral decay.”¹³ This view remained dominant for a considerable time both in and out of France, and although now viewed sceptically it still holds a fascination in the *vox populi*, and is still perpetuated by some historians. In revisionist history it has been counterclaimed “that it was not decadence that led to 1940; it is 1940 that has led us to view the late Third Republic as decadent.”¹⁴ The historian Jordan states that amongst the myths associated with the fall of France was “not the military command, but the decadent politicians and broader society” who were to blame.¹⁵ The argument that one of the causes of 1940 was decadence remains a contentious matter.

Hoffmann noted that “the marks, scars and wounds are there, but they immediately raise questions...how can one distinguish, in their source, the disaster of May-June 1940 from the disaster of the preceding years?”¹⁶ Michael Howard view ought to be noted that the “military system of a

nation is not an independent section of the social system but an aspect of its totality.”¹⁷ Tolstoy believed “that victory in a battle depended on massive historical forces outside the control of any individual,” and this could be significant in relating to the factors leading up to 1940.¹⁸ General Beaufre claimed there was a period of decay “caused by the excess of the effort during World War One. I think we have suffered from an illness, which is not peculiar to France, that of having been victorious and believing that we were right and very clever.”¹⁹ On all sides of the French political divides many thought France was about to collapse due to cultural and political degeneration.²⁰ An internationally renowned medieval French historian Marc Bloch, who was an officer in the French call up and later died in the Resistance, wrote that “he blamed the ruling class, the military and the politicians, the press and the teachers, for a flawed national policy and a weak defence against the Nazi menace, for betraying the real France, and abandoning its children.”²¹ The same type of attitude was taken in the British publication *Guilty Men*, indicting those who were called appeasers. In many minds during the war and in postwar analysis, there has been a strong argument for seeking some of the reasons for the French defeat within the political leadership.

Decadence has often been regarded as the prime reason for explaining the French defeat; the term conjures up all kinds of images, but in reality it refers to a degree of political instability; a divided society polarised by political extremes; a country riddled with various forms of xenophobia, including a virulent anti-Semitism, and differing attitudes towards pacifism and appeasement. All these factors have been associated with politicians, military leaders and a society, haunted by the wretched and painful memories of the Great War, and especially the sacrificed men of Verdun. It has been popularly indicated that “France was even less prepared psychologically than military” for the onslaught.²²

Throughout the interbellum period (1920-39) there existed the key question of economics and rearmament. There were hopes for disarmament, but when they proved fruitless a frantic rush to rearm caused France serious problems in terms of money and industry, and transpired to be a fundamental issue at a national economic level. Most French political leaders were acutely aware of these concerns, struggling with these problems preoccupied their professional lives. It proved a fruitless task not only because of finances, but because it created a failure to provide any form of continuous policy. For some historians there has been a tendency not to locate the blame on the Third Republic generally, but on the leaders, but the two factors are difficult to separate.²³