

# Abroad

## The Communist Attack on the French Parliament

By ANNE O'HARE McCORMICK

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

PARIS, Jan. 16—The scenes in the National Assembly this week were as ominous in their way as the November strikes. There was an element of farce in the performance, as when the Communists hurled epithets like "chewing gum" and "Coca-Cola" across a chamber filled, they said, with "American puppets." But it was a tragic farce; the French commentators who watched the proceedings from the gloomy recesses above the howling arena saw in the Communist play the beginning of an all-out assault on the parliamentary system.

The strikes last fall were an attempt to produce chaos in the life of the country and defeat the Marshall Plan by cutting down production. They succeeded in reducing the output of coal and industrial goods to the value of about one hundred million dollars, but at the cost of a schism in the labor front that has broken the power of the French Communist party to a greater extent than any election can measure. Reports turned into many Foreign Offices agree that at the meeting in Poland when the Cominform was organized, Jacques Duclos protested bitterly that the tactics imposed on the French party would result in the loss of support of the working masses. Mr. Zhdanov is said to have indicated clearly that the French working masses don't matter much when it comes to carrying out top-level Moscow policy.

### The Hard Core

The French worker wasn't told this, but he senses it and the wholesale desertion of the CGT in consequence represents the most significant anti-Communist movement in Europe. It shouldn't be forgotten, however, that among the great unions which stay in the CGT thousands of members are willing to work for Moscow. This is the hard core the Cominform counts on in preference to the unreliable mass.

The demonstration at the reopening of the Assembly was aimed at producing political chaos and preventing the Government from functioning effectively. Old parliamentary correspondents have assisted at more violent and dramatic seances, a writer in *Le Monde* remarks, but "never have they seen turned into ridicule in this manner the Parliament, the Presidency of the Chamber, the rites, the cult, the traditions, in a word—the old democracy."

The result in this case is to increase the demand for revision of the Constitution and to strengthen the chances of the return to power of General de Gaulle. President Herriot himself announced that proposals for amending the rules of debate are being formulated.

But the big question remains. What are the Communists after? Their tactics seem almost deliberately calculated to help de Gaulle's Rally of the French People. They have refused to accept office in the Assembly on the ground that yesterday's elections (which gave them two Vice Presidencies out of six and other posts in proportion) were illegal. This echoes the de Gaullist charges that the present Government is illegitimate. The new doubts they have raised about the workability of the Constitution likewise play into de Gaulle's hand. In working to discredit Parliament and the Government they are doing their best to hasten the general election that the RFP demands.

### No Faith in Politicians

Why? The French are tired to death of political storms. Listen to plasterers exchanging opinions as they patch up a room; eavesdrop on a provincial family discussing the menu at a supposed to be cheap restaurant; talk to students, housewives, small storekeepers. The story is always the same. These people have lost whatever little faith they had in the parties. Some are for de Gaulle because they think he isn't a politician. Some are against him because he didn't do any better than the others when he had a chance. Aside from his fervent disciples, and they are many, especially among the young, the idea of de Gaulle creates a certain uneasiness—will he or will he not be a dictator? But some of the uneasy will vote for him "faute de mieux." Among his followers there is as much resignation as enthusiasm. Whether Communists intend it or not, the resigned are bound to become more numerous as the Communist-created confusion deepens.

It looks from here as if Moscow doesn't read French very well. Some shrewd observers, however, see method in the apparent madness of the Cominform orders. Their guess is that the Communist tactics in France ignore by-products to concentrate on the end product of their campaign. Their aim in making the attack on the Parliament, in the view of these oracles, is to provoke the Government into firing the first shot—not a literal shot but the first act of suppression—in the civil war. The idea is that a repressive policy will cause so much turmoil that the recovery program will be fatally slowed down.

This conjecture doesn't seem to give enough weight to the character of the French people. Just now they are weary, pessimistic and exasperated. They want someone to tie down the runaway franc and they won't pay taxes until this paper is worth something and they can trust the people who spend it. As long as it lasts the Schuman Government isn't likely to be stampeded into doing anything reckless, and the French, despite their doubts and grievances, are in the same mood. The fact that they have beaten the Communists once makes it easier for them to do it again. Not much is certain today, least of all the prophets, except that Communist stock is going down even as prices are going up.