

FRANCE

Date of Elections: June 23 and 30, 1968

Characteristics of Parliament:

French citizens were called upon to elect their deputies to the National Assembly following the dissolution on May 31 of the previous Chamber, elected on March 5 and 12, 1967.

There are 487 members of the National Assembly, 470 of whom represent the departments of metropolitan France, 10 the overseas departments and 7 the overseas territories. All elections are held by direct ballot for a period of four years.

The Upper Chamber of the French Parliament, the Senate, comprises 284 members who fall into four categories:

- 264 senators representing the departments of metropolitan France elected in each case by a college of notables
- 7 senators representing the overseas departments, elected in the same way
- 6 senators representing the overseas territories, elected in the same way
- 6 senators representing French citizens living outside France and elected by the Senate on submission of candidatures by the Higher Council for French Citizens living Abroad

Senators are elected for a term of nine years, a third of the Senate being renewed every three years.

Electoral System:

All French citizens of both sexes and aged at least 21, who enjoy full civil and political rights and are under no legal bar, are entitled to vote.

The electoral registers, which are revised each year, are drawn up on the last day of February for the ensuing twelve-month period. Certain changes may be made during this period, notwithstanding the expiry of the time-limit for revisions. It should however be mentioned that, during the recent elections, several political parties protested against the fact that the State Council had decided against revising the electoral registers so as to include citizens who had reached the age of 21 between February 28 and June 23, 1968.

Elections to the National Assembly are held in 487 constituencies (470 in metropolitan France, 10 in overseas departments and 7 in overseas territories) on a majority uninominal ballot in two rounds.

In order to be elected on the first ballot, a candidate must obtain an absolute majority of the valid votes cast. In the second round, the candidate who obtains the most votes is elected.

In order to be eligible for the second round, candidates must have obtained a number of votes equal to at least 10 per cent of the total number of registered voters in the constituency. However, if only one candidate fulfils this condition, then the person who polls the second largest number of votes in the first round may also participate in the run-off.

Voters over 23 years of age who are not otherwise barred by law are eligible for election to the Chamber of Deputies. Naturalized foreigners and women who have acquired French nationality by marriage are only eligible upon expiry of a period of ten years from the date of their naturalization. Moreover, a certain number of magistrates and leading officials in public administration are also ineligible.

The same conditions for eligibility apply to senators, except that the latter are required to be at least 35 years of age.

General Political Considerations and Conduct of the Elections:

In May 1968, France was the theatre of a serious crisis. The disturbances sparked off by certain groups of students very rapidly

developed into a generalized airing of grievances, approved or supported in varying degrees by the left-wing opposition political groups. The occupation of faculties and other education centres was soon followed by the occupation of factories and places of work. By the end of May, millions of workers were on strike, and violent clashes between demonstrators and police were occurring with increasing frequency in the streets of Paris and numerous provincial towns. The entire economic life of France was paralysed and its political regime contested.

Confronted with this situation, General de Gaulle first of all announced his intention of submitting a programme of reform to the nation by means of a referendum — a plan which came up against considerable opposition in the country and on which the Council of State later expressed certain reserves. Thereupon, on May 31, the President of the Republic decided to dissolve the National Assembly and to hold elections in accordance with the Constitution so as to enable the people to designate new representatives according to their views, thus "safeguarding republican legality" in the face of "a totalitarian movement".

Yet only a few days before, on May 22, a censure motion brought before Parliament by the opposition parties had only managed to gain 233 votes out of the requisite majority of 244. However, in the opinion of the Government party — and this was to become one of the themes of its campaign — the weakness of its majority in the Assembly since the 1967 elections had severely tied its hands and prevented it from carrying out the reforms whose absence had made it possible for the crisis to develop.

Be this as it may, the decision was to contribute a great deal towards relieving the tension. A minority did in fact contest the validity of legislative elections as a means of solving a crisis which Parliament had been powerless to deal with, but none of the opposition parties attempted to evade the verdict of a universal vote. The strikes lost their political implications and workers gradually went back to work — though not without a number of dramatic incidents — after many of them had obtained major

material concessions on the basis of the conclusions reached by trade union and Government representatives at a meeting at the Ministry of Social Affairs from May 25 to 27.

As regards the electoral campaign, the supporters of Gaullist policy combined forces under the label Union for the Defence of the Republic (UDR), which comprised orthodox and left-wing Gaullists together with most of the members of the National Federation of Independent Republicans under the leadership of Mr. Giscard d'Estaing. Taking up the main themes of General de Gaulle's major speeches, the leaders of the UDR denounced the subversive activities of the Communist Party, which they accused of seeking to introduce totalitarianism through violence by supporting the other left-wing groups just long enough to strengthen its own forces. Some also developed the concept of workers' participation in enterprises, put forward by the Head of State as a third solution that avoided the disadvantages inherent in the capitalist and Communist systems. They all claimed the full support of citizens who were in favour of progress in order and attached both to national traditions and to the republican form of government.

On the other hand, the left-wing parties — namely, the Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left, presided over by Mr. Mitterand, the Communist Party under its Secretary General, Mr. Waldeck-Rochet, and the United Socialist Party led by Mr. Rocard — laid the blame on the policy followed by the Government and Head of State whose failure, they felt, was proved by the crisis which had developed after ten years of unshared power. They too claimed to be the champions of democracy and called for the introduction of a policy of dialogue between all interested parties.

The point must be made, however, that the variety of interpretations given by left-wing groups to the protest grievance movement and the direction which they each tried to give to events which, though originating elsewhere, did not always leave their own machinery untouched gave rise to serious divisions among them which damaged both their unity and their public image.

In the Centre was the Progress and Modern Democracy group whose members had divided over the vote on the censure motion during the previous Legislature. Feeling that the splitting of the French nation into two opposite camps was dangerous, even impossible, its leader, Mr. J. Duhamel, proposed a third solution and, defending traditional Christian Democratic beliefs, strongly recommended the adoption of a more active European policy.

Finally, the appearance on the scene of two new groups should be mentioned. On the one hand was the Reform Movement which had been created a few days before the poll by Mr. Edgard Pisani, a former Minister under Mr. Pompidou's Government who had broken with the majority during the crisis by voting **for** the censure motion on May 22. On the other, *Technique et democratic* grouped together, under Mr. Baret's leadership, a number of technocrats who had earlier brought themselves to the attention of political circles by publishing studies and analyses of important matters of public interest.

The two ballots were set for June 23 and 30, 1968. Faint efforts were made, by both majority and opposition, to present a single candidate at the very first ballot, but this concept did not prevail and finally, on June 23, the political groups each went before the country independently. That day, 2,267 candidates contested the 470 seats to be filled throughout the country.

The figures which appear below indicate the strong current in favour of followers of General de Gaulle. It will also be seen that, compared with the March 1967 elections, a greater number of candidates won an absolute majority of votes, thereby securing a seat on the first ballot. Moreover, not one of the candidates of the Reform Movement, *Technique et democratic* or extreme right-wing groups obtained a number of votes equal to 10 per cent of the registered electors; consequently, they were not entitled to take part in the second ballot. Similarly, 229 of the 232 candidates of the United Socialist Party, which had strongly supported the most advanced student and worker elements in May, were eliminated in this way, although it was in fact the only left-wing group to gain votes over 1967.

On June 30, some 671 candidates remained to contest the 316 seats in metropolitan France where a run-off ballot was required. The political parties adopted the same strategy as that employed for the March 1967 elections. Within both the Government bloc and the left-wing opposition, candidates did not oppose one another but withdrew in favour of the best-placed candidate among them. As for the Centre party, it benefited at times from the withdrawal of the Gaullist candidates and at times from that of its left-wing opponent. Consequently, in the second round, in 279 cases there were only two contestants left.

As regards the left-wing, the electorate, no doubt influenced by the lack of unity revealed by the opposition parties on many points, did not always go along with the agreements reached at the political level. It was this phenomenon that was largely responsible for the failure of certain personalities, such as Mr. Mendes-France, former President of the Council, who did not manage to pick up all the votes which should normally have come to him in the second ballot.

On June 30, the electorate again expressed its disapproval of the disorders which had accompanied the events in May and generally indicated its confidence in the current holders of office. Paradoxically, the outcome of this general election, which had been provoked by a crisis that had threatened the very existence of the regime, was the exceptional strengthening of the Government party's position, as can be seen below from the table showing the distribution of seats among the political groups.

Statistics:

1. *Results of the First Round of Voting in Metropolitan France*

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------|
| Number of registered electors | 28,171,635 |
| Voters. | 22,539,743 (80%) |
| Blank or void ballot papers | 401,086 |
| Valid votes. | 22,138,657 |

| Political Group | 1968 | | 1967 | | Members elected | Members elected |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------|------------------|-------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | Qn | 3 | Qn | M | on JTM« | on M<£sh |
| Union for the Defence of the Republic . . . | 9,663,605 | 43.65 | 8,448,982 | 37.73 | | |
| Non-UDR and Moderate Inde- pendent Repu- blicans | 917,539 | 4.14 | 821,097 | 3.66 | 142 | 62 |
| Communist Party | 4,435,357 | 20.03 | 5,039,032 | 22.51 | 6 | 8 |
| Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left . | 3,654,003 | 16.50 | 4,224,110 | 18.96 | 0 | 1 |
| Progress and Mod- ern Democracy Centre | 2,290,165 | 10.34 | 2,829,998 | 12.64 | 4 | 1 |
| United Socialist Party | 874,212 | 3.94 | 495,412 | 2.21 | 0 | 0 |
| Various Left-Wing Parties | 163,679 | 0.73 | 319,651 | 1.42 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Technique et dimo- cratie.</i> | 77,378 | 0.34 | did not exist | — | 0 | — |
| Reform Movement | 33,848 | 0.15 | did not exist | — | 0 | — |
| Extreme Right. . | 28,871 | 0.13 | 191,232 | 0.85 | 0 | 0 |

*2. Distribution of Seats among the Political Groups after the
Second Round of Voting*

| Political Group | Number of Seats in the National Assembly | Number of Seats in the Previous House |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Union for the Defence of the Republic | 295 | 187 |
| Independent Republicans | (14) | 43 |
| Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left | 57 | 118 |
| Communist Party. | 54 | 73 |
| Progress and Modern Democracy Centre. | 28 | 42 |
| United Socialist Party. | — | 5 |
| Others | 9 | 9 |
| | 487 | 487 |

*3. Distribution of Deputies to the National Assembly among the
Various Parliamentary Groups*

| Parliamentary Group | of 500 Seats |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Union of Democrats for the Republic. | 292 |
| Independent Republicans. | 61 |
| Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left | 57 |
| Communists. | 34 |
| Progress and Modern Democracy. | 33 |
| No Affiliation. | 10 |
| | 487 |

4. *Distribution of Deputies to the National Assembly according to Profession*

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------|----|
| Farmers | 30 | Barristers | 28 |
| Maritime professions | 1 | Ministerial officials... | 12 |
| Managers. | 41 | Other liberal professions | 24 |
| Tradesmen | 11 | Journalists. | 18 |
| Craftsmen | 6 | Teachers. | 46 |
| Engineers. | 11 | Magistrates. | 2 |
| Various "cadres" | 40 | Major State bodies | 56 |
| Employees | 8 | Other officials. | 16 |
| Manual workers | 12 | Officers. | 5 |
| Doctors-surgeons. | 38 | Railway "cadres" and employees. | 2 |
| Pharmacists. | 15 | Pensioners. | 4 |
| Dentists. | 4 | Others. | 34 |
| Veterinary surgeons | 8 | | |

487