

SPECIAL REPORT Exclusive IPS Translation

The Crisis is Open

by Michel Debre, *Le Figaro* March 23

Introduction

Former French Prime Minister Michel Debré declared open war against the pro-NATO policies of French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing this week, following a protracted 18-month period during which, as spiritual leader of the Gaullist movement, he has been the most consistent and severe critic of all aspects of the French government's actions. Debré's call for the formation of a government of "public safety" in March 23 Le Figaro concludes a long series of warnings to Giscard to begin reversing his lax monetary, economic, demographic and defense policies, and to re-orient the government's tasks in accordance with traditional Gaullist tenets.

Debré is a nominal member of the UDR Gaullist party's executive, but he has removed himself from all active participation in the party's deliberations because of his fundamental disagreement with the strategy of collaboration with Giscard practised by Gaullist Prime Minister Chirac, which, according to Debré, traps the UDR into supporting the President even when his policies sharply diverge from the Gaullists'. The UDR is the main component of Giscard's parliamentary majority.

*While Debré is described by pro-Giscard press as "isolated," all sources agree that he is the most listened to and respected of all the Gaullist "barons," and that his call intersects considerable anti-Atlanticist ferment within the UDR and the UJP, the Gaullist youth group. Former UDR general secretary Alexandre Sanguinetti — a close ally of Debré's — described the intent of the Debré call in an interview with the Catholic magazine *Témoignage Chretien* last week: "Either the government implements the program of the UDR, or the regime will undergo a major crisis."*

I want to speak of the government crisis. It is open in France. The fact that it is also open, and gravely so, in Italy, in Great Britain, without forgetting the U.S., is no consolation, and even less an encouragement to remain passive.

When production and employment curves improved in western democracies after the 1930's crisis, it was too late. The crisis had become political. The difficulties of the world worsened by unemployment and monetary disorders had created irreversible situations and too many democracies, that is to say too many democrats, had displayed their impotence.

History does not repeat itself and Professor Renouvin (famous French historian of the years between the First and Second World Wars — ed.) was right to say that the same causes do not produce the same effects. However, it is not because a Third World War using Europe as its theater does not appear probable not imminent that we must underestimate the consequences of the crisis. The effects are and will be

different, but of the same nature: violence, disorder, decadence, tyranny.

We will probably read better health bulletins in the coming months: Rising production, lower unemployment. On the condition, however, that monetary difficulties and price increases do not stall the upswing, notably insofar as France is concerned! Even if we resume our march forward on a surer footing, the economic crisis will have revealed, in a world which is still pitiless for the weak, the impotence of a great number of democrats, and first our own impotence, for which we are responsible.

In what concerns us, indeed, let us look things in the face.

Domestic reality is disastrous. It is marked by a constant hyperinflation whose economic, social, political consequences are visible and which do not experience any real slow-down. The coffers of numerous industrial firms and numerous agricultural businesses are in very bad shape. Distortions are worsening between the revenues of the categories of Frenchmen who profit from the increases and those who suffer from them. Confidence in the French currency is durably affected.

To this disastrous evil, other evils are added: Disorders which are not sanctioned; violence which is not punished. Only those who visit only Paris salons and their wordly branches in the mountains or at the shore ignore the profound disarray of public opinion, which understands neither the bonus given to disorder nor indulgence toward violations of the law and common crimes.

External reality is no less anguishing. One dismisses Atlanticism, that is to say submission to the United States. One dismisses neutralism, that is to say "Finlandization," to use a term in fashion.

In fact, these are words: The United States, for lack of frightening their adversaries, brutally imposes itself on its allies and our non-resistance encourages the advocates of the second formula, to which we risk being condemned, through a popular reflex, against our insufficient independence. As for Europe, let us be honest. It is becoming an alibi. In fact, Europe, such as its construction is presented to us, is not a foreign policy, but the abandonment of any foreign policy in favor of a sometimes ridiculous, always distressing non-being. In fact, one refuses to see the international competition which, pitilessly, is rampant within and without the western world. Blindness hides behind ideologies which themselves hide more and more poorly a weakness analogous to the laxity encountered in the face of domestic problems.

This refusal to become conscious of realities in France expresses a profound sickness, the sickness which undermines our democracy: the refusal to govern, the refusal of power.

Inside: incomes policy; balance public finances, the budgets of the State, of Social Security, of pension funds, of local governments; make efforts in industrial production, agricultural production and foreign trade, along with the necessary reconversions and redeployments, and also the necessary limitations of fiscal and social expenditures; youth training, orientation and selection on the double basis of merit and social promotion; civilian service coupled with

military service, extended to include young ladies so as to ensure economically and socially useful labor; these directives for action are known and correspond with common sense in a period of grave national difficulties. We must add to this, since several evils have come on top of those which flow from inflation and the economic situation, the recovery of the State in its essential functions — public order and justice.

The outside flows from the inside. A country sure of itself, placing the organization of labor above that of vacations, concerned with monetary stability, i.e. savings and investments, pre-occupied with social unity, i.e. with public equipment and participation, affirming in the facts the authority of the State, is assured to have the means of national independence and international solidarity, as one does not go without the other — something everybody ought to know.

This policy is in no way beyond our means. It is no way beyond the comprehension of the people. It demands a government inside and power outside. Democracy is not the absence of government, neither is the absence of power the compulsory lot of medium-sized nations.

In this respect, let me say to those who govern us that they are stubbornly clinging to a wrong analysis of the facts and to a deep misconception in action.

The Socialists and Communists only speak of liberty and liberties. It is a skillful tactic. We follow them on this terrain as if we were ashamed. One does not know what to invent to affirm the preeminence not only of individual rights, but also of individual desires, interests and passions, while denouncing social discipline, the laws of the State, the morality of the nation.

This is a considerable error.

What makes up the attractiveness of the Common Program, what notably makes the attractiveness of the Socialists in France, as that of the Communists in Italy, is the hope for a government capable of solving difficulties and reestablishing pride. In one word, one expects from the opposition an authority, an effectiveness and an independence which the majority seems incapable of affirming heretofore. Liberalism has donned the cloak of impotence. The more advanced it is proclaimed, the more impotent it appears. It is somewhat ridiculous in the freest country in the world to create a liberties commission, when we would need a commission for social effectiveness and for authority in democracy.

The crisis is open. Once again, a choice needs to be made: Either of a 'public safety' government, based on the authority of the State, financial rigor, social solidarity, national independence; or of a slide toward social desolation, economic weakening, foreign submission, without forgetting demographic ruin and, in the final analysis, at best, an overthrow of the majority at worst, a government which will rely on the street, if not one and the other solution together.

A few readers will write me. In advance I thank them. But these lines which call for action will leave indifferent a government which believes it can remain above the melee while dreaming. But we are in the melee and from now on, events will go fast.

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL DEBRÉ

On French Radio Station; RTL; Evening; March 23

Debré: The French political class, be it in the majority or in the opposition, is dreaming, immersed in unreality.

Q: Do you consider yourself in the majority or in the opposition.?

Debré: The question does not lie here. One cannot talk of a majority or of an opposition. What I wanted to do through my article is provoke a surge, a popular surge...The French are a politically mature people. They want to be governed...What I want is the creation of a public safety government, outside all electoral or political combinations, outside ideologies...A government of 'public safety' to implement:

- a monetary policy capable of strengthening our currency.
- a policy of social progress.
- a firm family policy.
- a firm national independence policy.

The French political class is deep in dreams...My goal is to wake it up, to explain to the majority that it is losing, not because of the left, but because of its own policy...It is possible to create this government. Don't talk to me of such and such political estate which intends to have another policy, etc...It is a matter of will. It is a serious formula. It is out of the question to deal with details at this point.

Q: Aren't you weakening President Giscard d'Estaing within one day of his national televised address? Aren't you siding with the opposition?

Debré: That is not the problem...It is necessary to urgently provoke this popular surge...On the economic plane, what I want is not a policy of rigor or austerity, it is a policy of social progress and expansion within the framework of a healthy economy. One cannot depend on more than one has. We must put an incomes policy into place. Look at West Germany and see if the policy adopted these last few years is called an austerity policy. German tourists have the most beautiful cars. It is a matter of putting into place an economic and financial policy based on this health of the economy. We do not want France to apply an Italian or British policy...It would be a disaster and France would no longer exist. France needs a new policy.