

News Chronicle — 9 Sept. 46

The Strange Case of "Col. Passy"

What lay behind the recent imprisonment of the former Chief of General de Gaulle's Secret Service, "Col. Passy"? French opinion is suspicious. Here News Chronicle Special Correspondent COLIN WILLS reveals why a public inquiry is demanded

PARIS, Sunday.
COLONEL ANDRE DE WAVRIN, who, under the pseudonym of "Colonel Passy" was head of Gen. de Gaulle's secret service, and who now is in hospital in Paris following four months' military imprisonment, declared last night that he would sue the Ministers of the Army and Air Force for illegal detention. He also declared he had a full answer to the charges of misuse of funds entrusted to his counter-espionage service by the Provisional Government and that he would ventilate the whole affair.

French public opinion will force an immediate inquiry into the "Passy" case, which is exciting more interest and more feeling at the moment than the most critical aspects of international affairs, and not without reason. People are incensed at the revelation that de Wavrin has been held for months without a proper trial. During his imprisonment he has become extremely ill and lost 40lb. in weight.

OFFICIAL DENIAL

The authorities deny he was tortured and that he was starved. They say he was too shocked nervously to eat. They deny he was held *incommunicado*. They do not explain why he was not given proper attention and treatment until recently. But the public is even more concerned with the political mystery which lies behind the Passy affair.

The large sums involved—£100,000 has already been mentioned, but I understand that it may be as much as £300,000—suggest that something other than mere embezzlement for private purposes is charged.

It is widely believed that the real reason for Passy's arrest is that the authorities are on the

three outlying neighbourhoods around Paris. They were no more than parties of ordinary citizens, met together in private rooms of cafes, to talk together. As such they were perfectly legal in a land of free speech. Nor were their members of a dangerous kind, largely because they appeared to lack both intelligence and vigour. But the interesting thing is that they, and no doubt other groups, do meet regularly to exchange pipe-dreams about "purging France of Bolshevism".

The "anti-Bolshevik" talk is, of course, accompanied by opposition to the present regime in France and criticism of the proposed constitution.

ANTI-DEMOCRATIC

Whatever the form of the constitution which emerges, these people will be against it for the very reason that it will be democratic. They want "a strong France with strong leaders"—meaning dictatorial leaders.

The most ominous aspect of this dictatorship mentality is that its protagonists almost universally turn their thoughts to the only man who seems big enough to be "the strong leader"—General de Gaulle.

It is not suggested General de Gaulle is party to any activity whatever directed towards a dictatorship. But he cannot personally examine, and much less can he influence, the personal opinions of all the millions who see in him the hope of France.

De Gaulle's public statements are full of opposition to ideas of dictatorship, but they are also extremely individualistic, and though he talks of himself as an ordinary Frenchman it is clear he knows that he is a very extraordinary Frenchman, and indeed there can be no doubt he regards himself as the only man—the only man who has yet emerged, at least—who can save France from confusion and frustration.

De Gaulle is reported to have

stated, when de Wavrin (Passy) was arrested: "If he is guilty he must be punished." But the public remembers that de Wavrin was one of de Gaulle's right-hand men, that he is an expert at secret activity, and so they suspect, not de Gaulle, but certain of the new "Gaullistes" of using de Wavrin to form a secret organisation designed to force the general into power either as a too-powerful President or in some other authoritarian capacity.

These suspicions may be absolutely unfounded; all the more reason for an immediate inquiry. And the fact that de Wavrin is accused of misusing very large sums of money is taken by the suspicious to indicate that no mere embezzlement for private spending is charged, but a seizure of funds to finance the secret organisation.

There is no question whatever that if people of Fascist tendencies are to be found in the ranks of the Gaullistes they are in a very small minority.

ORGANISATION

The new Gaullism is a movement and a very real and active one. Every time de Gaulle proposes to deliver a discourse the publicity and the organisation for the event are exactly the same, as though he were head of the State instead of merely a famous and brilliant private citizen. Special telephones, including overseas telephones, are installed in the local post offices at the towns where he is to speak. Hundreds of police, including not only the local police but the National Garde Mobile, are mustered to guard the roads, line the streets and escort the general's entourage. Representatives of Government departments are detached to arrange everything, including Press coverage.

And another remarkable fact is that in certain Government departments there are groups of people who openly call themselves "the bureau of the