

FOCUS ON FRANCE

Paris, city of contrasts, but pre-eminently a centre of fashion. In the great house of Reville, sophisticated models display the trend in furs.

Occasionally the girls group together. Monotony is relieved in low voiced conversation. What is their talk about? Is it of the ceremony in the Louvre Museum, where Ingrid Bergman is hailed as France's best foreign interpreter? Where Jean Cocteau (the Noel Coward of France) presents her with a model of the Victory of Samothrace?

Is it talk of the glittering reception at the Elysee Palace, where the world's leading political figures meet - for a brief hour - to smile and chat on commonplace affairs?

Where the warmth of the occasion thaws into sudden geniality the sombre figure of Mr. Vishinsky?

No, the models talk is in a lower key, for like the rest of Paris they are stranded by another transport strike. With the tubes immobilised and without bus services, Parisians face another day of finding new ways to cross their city. Walking, hitch hiking, cycling, or packed like cattle into open lorries, their plight is an outward reflection of the tragic political position in which France finds herself today.

Exploiting the situation for personal ambition, or moving forward as its saviour in a spirit of pure patriotism, is General de Gaulle! Crowds throng his path on every speaking tour. Vast numbers pin their hopes upon him, but millions of French left-wingers fear him as a possible dictator. Millions more want what De Gaulle stands for (a stable government) but without De Gaulle.