

FRENCH ELECTION.

Desperate for stable government, angry at the endless cabinet crises, humiliated by North African reverses, plagued by soaring prices, France goes to the polls for the fifth time since the war. As the campaign develops, France's mood is: "We've heard it all before".

In village cafés, in public places, on peasant's doorstep, candidates plead their causes; for every vote counts in this vital election. In Alpine villages, where many families go for their Christmas holidays, snow ploughs clear the roads more busily than ever - everyone must be able to get home in time to vote.

Twenty-six million people are on the voting list, and when polling day comes there are few abstentions. Holidaymakers hurry home to cast their ballot. Four main blocks seek public support - the outgoing right-centre Government of Faure and Pinay; the left-wing Radicals and Socialists led by Mendès-France; the Communists; and the followers of shopkeeper Pierre Poujade, the anti-tax campaigner.

But all France's anger seems to bring her no nearer to a solution. Communists on the left, and Poujadists on the right, make sweeping gains. The big question is - will this compel the centre parties to close their ranks?