

CONTEMPORARY FRENCH POLITICS

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TO
MY MOTHER

PREFACE

To many, the results of the French elections of November 16, 1919, came as a welcome surprise. An American observer in Paris who had perhaps taken but a casual interest in French domestic problems would have been convinced, upon visiting the Palais Bourbon, that France was on the verge of being engulfed in a tidal wave of Bolshevism from the Russian deep. He would have heard aghast, the Extreme Left, led by the grandson of Karl Marx, Jean Longuet, shrieking its defiance at all things bourgeois. Possibly to his dismay, he would also have heard the thunderous stamping of feet by which the Socialists drowned the sound of the huge silver bell, through insistent ringing of which the President of the Chamber bravely struggled to maintain order. To the Americans at home the situation must have appeared no less ominous. Judged by the press reports, the tumult arising from the First of May celebrations, and the Socialist vituperations against the Peace Conference, surely gave cause for grave foreboding.

But a deeper knowledge of the currents which underlie the surface of the political waters in France belied any such catastrophe as the "storm prophets" had predicted. Those currents were deep; they were silent. Indeed, to their depth they owed their relentless power and their persistence in their normal course.

The strongest of these forces was the sterling character of the French people themselves. Only a very superficial estimate of national temperament will judge the French to be excitable, unpractical and unstable. Although the history of France has been marked by whirlwinds in which the nation has been blown hither

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and thither by the gust of every fresh political doctrine, French character possesses at least three qualities of impregnable strength.

The first of these is a personal attachment to property, whether a farm or a wine shop, which no gilded theory of Communism can shake. This attachment is nearly universal, for it is based upon the small holdings of 20,000,000 peasants and *petit bourgeois*. Moreover, the sentiment embodied in the *Code Napoléon* has been and is likely to remain the breakwater protecting the Republic against the lashing waves of the "*Internationale*." This great legal monument has given to France a scheme of social and economic principles which has exalted individualism and encouraged an almost devout attachment to property.

The second characteristic is a respect for authority. To us Americans who were recently in France, and to all Americans accustomed lightly to regard constituted power, the innate obedience and discipline of the French was something to be wondered at. It was first noticeable at the very gates of the city, where French farmers complacently allowed gendarmes to search their vehicles for objects upon which to levy the time-revered and superlatively irritating *octroi* tax. It appeared again amidst the solemnity of public bodies, whether at the Chamber of Deputies or the Hôtel de Ville, where chamberlains and attendants, girt about with great sashes and clanking swords, rendered due homage to officials whom they served. Even in the Chamber of Deputies, where members were allowed the greatest license, those who constituted the crowd filling the visitors' gallery were kept in docile submission by elaborately uniformed and decorated guards who did not hesitate to eject those who might attempt too boisterously to join in the Chamber's levity.

At the universities, this characteristic love of ceremonial and order was yet more noticeable—doubly

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so in contrast to American institutions of learning. French professors invariably deliver their lectures wearing their academic gowns; they are followed into class by an attendant who carries the lecturer's notes and deposits them respectfully upon his desk. At the professor's entrance, his class rises and maintains a restrained silence until he has taken his seat; and when he leaves at the close of the hour, they again dutifully stand until he has left the room. One must not altogether scoff at these niceties. They may be an inheritance from the Monarchy and the Empire, observed under the Republic to give it an added discipline which the force of kings formerly imposed. They may be a reflection of the ceremonialism dear to the Catholic Church—last vestiges of the union of Rome with the State. But whatever their causes, they apparently oppose one of the staunchest obstacles to any elements endeavoring to snatch authority from those in whom it has been legally vested.

Finally, the French possess a civic spirit which amounts to more than enthusiasm, is wider than patriotism and different from religious zeal. It is a whole-souled devotion to the cause each man feels is his own, yet at the same time extending beyond worship at particularistic shrines and uniting before the altar of *La Patrie*. The difference between French and American temperament was illustrated on the night of the armistice. *Poilus* and *midinettes* forgot their cherished cynicism to join in singing, with a genuine spirit of thankfulness, the "Marseillaise." How could such as they understand the Americans, who, on the other hand, serpentine along the *rues* and *boulevards*, singing, not the "Star Spangled Banner," but "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here!" America cheered at the finishing of a dirty job and went out to celebrate. France thanked Providence for winning a Crusade.

The passionate devotion to *La Patrie* allows the ship

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of state to drift on the swells, but always within the limits which the length of this spiritual anchor chain imposes. Whether it be found in the street song of "Conspuez Guillaume," which French students shouted day after day during the first weeks of the armistice, or in some Catholic *Te Deum*, a devout and enthusiastic nationalism, completely submerging class selfishness, is the dominant trait in French character to-day. France, in spite of the fact that Paris has ever been a fecund breeding ground for new creeds and theories of social and moral destruction, is nevertheless the most conservative country in the world.

There are some singular misconceptions in America as to the nature of French political organizations. Text-books, when they can be persuaded to deal with the subject, often assert that in reality French political parties do not exist. Organizations spring up in the cool of the night, only to have the burning sun of a new political faction wither them away on the following day. But although France does not have the two-party system as it exists in England and America, I have tried to point out what are the lasting and the continuous features in French political organization and to prove that party multiplicity is not due entirely to an undisciplined resentment to control, but has causes which, if existing in any other country, would produce identical effects. Also I have tried to show that, although some parliamentary groups may be transient and unstable, French parties possess an organization and a personnel which are well defined.

I may have burdened the reader with wearisome details, but I have felt these necessary to show the elements of organization and the differences in the doctrines of present political groupings. The first part of the book may perhaps be described as a study of the political forces of France. Along with the political parties, I have included the French Press, for it pos-

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sesses distinctively political characteristics and it assumes an aggressive political leadership.

The second portion of the book may be called a study of the movements for political reform. Under this heading I have discussed the recent electoral bill which has offset the predominance of the Radical and Socialist vote in the Chamber of Deputies, a predominance to which, hitherto, they were not wholly entitled. The demand for constitutional reform—including decentralization of government administration—is most insistent. I have attempted to show the causes of these demands and also the likelihood of the adoption of the proposed remedies. Of special interest to Americans should be the attempt to do away with the present system of parliamentary government and to substitute for it a government modeled upon that of the United States, in which the President plays a more prominent rôle. Likewise, the question of the demand for experts in administration, and even for professional representation in political bodies, that is to say, legislatures composed of business men to supplement, if not entirely to replace, political assemblies, should be of added value, in view of our own problems.

The policy of the French Government during the past war has also been touched upon, notably, the questions raised by the state of siege, the censorship, the State control of nearly every phase of industrial life, the prohibition of importations, and the "consortium" policy followed up to and throughout the armistice. Americans who have witnessed the gradual development of the power of their President should also be interested in the exactly opposite phenomenon noticeable in France, *viz.*, the increasing dominance of French legislative authority.

It has been impossible to separate completely a consideration of political forces from the study of the various movements of reform. Indeed the *raison d'être*

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of many of the political parties is, logically, to bring about these reforms. The latter questions all figured more or less prominently in the November elections.

Many people believed that the issues of this election lay between those who sanctioned the war and those who opposed it. The Unified Socialists were the principal opposition. Personal antagonism to M. Clemenceau, partly arising from a faction within his own party, led by M. Franklin Bouillon, also played a part.

The issue of Bolshevism was of even more importance. The Unified Socialist party in its Easter congress definitely pledged itself, as we shall see, to work for the inauguration of a Soviet form of government and the complete establishment of proletariat control. The issue which they brought before the voters was therefore clear-cut. The temper of the French people again proved its conservatism and its loyalty by an overwhelming defeat of such extremists as Jean Longuet, Jacques Sadoul, Raffin-Dugens, and Brizon, who had insistently preached the Social Revolution. Their hopes of bringing about the revolution through peaceful means have been sadly disappointed. Whether or not this failure will dampen their efforts to achieve a *coup de poing* for the same end, is another question.

But the third issue in the French election, one obscured by the two larger issues, yet of equal importance in the eyes of many electors, was the question of principle involved in the opposition of State Socialism and individual initiative. This issue I have tried to outline in a chapter on the "French Bureaucracy and State Socialism," and to show how the war has accelerated the participation of the Government in industrial activities which have hitherto been reserved to individual effort. The French Radical party—which has maintained the balance of power in the French Chamber since the beginning of the century—is definitely pledged to Collectivism. Its program is to take over all public services

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and all industrial enterprises when the latter become sufficiently organized to permit the experiment, at least, of State operation.

This tendency, differing widely from the pure Marxism preached by the Unified party, which demands a complete *bouleversement* of the present order and the directorate of the proletariat, conflicts with the sturdy individualism which is one of the most distinctive traits of the French people. The existence of State Socialism in France is partly accounted for by the fact that nearly all of the public services owe their origin to the State and not to individuals, as in America. The adventures of American private initiative in the development of virgin resources have no counterpart in French history. Furthermore, the French character is conservative, while the American character is sanguine and given to "plunging." A Frenchman does not often possess that large share of imagination and business capacity which has made American "steel kings."

Again, the Radical party has been maintained in power upon issues other than economic, such as anti-clericalism. Their collectivist program has been partly imposed by the strength of their own position. The war, which so exaggerated the Statist tendency, placed the issue squarely before the French public. Measures taken permanently to fasten this incubus upon France were legalized by a Parliament and a Ministry whose mandate had been extra-legally prolonged and which owed its election to other issues. Business elements, such as the Union of Economic Interests, and all of the Conservative and Centrist parties proclaimed against a further injection of State effort into industry. It became certain that the issue would come up before the elections for settlement. Signs of this discontent were evidenced by the fall of Victor Boret, Minister of Agriculture, in July, 1919. The elections apparently placed the seal of disapproval on the Government's anti-individ-

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ualistic program by the defeat of five members of the Government, two of whom, at least, M. Clémentel, Minister of Commerce, and M. Morel, Undersecretary of the Liquidation of War Supplies, were directly responsible for many of the more radical features of the policy. Finally, the reduction of the Radical representatives by a hundred at the last election seemed to have been caused partly by their over-insistence upon policies of State Socialism.

The last part of this book deals with French opinion as it was expressed toward the peace settlement. Originally, France demanded terms of peace which would either erect the Rhenish provinces into a buffer state or annex them to France. She also asked for military guarantees which would supply the only security of which the "old diplomacy" was capable. America's insistence on a League of Nations, however, led to the abandonment of many of the old theories of "guarantees," and to the formal adoption of the policy of a League of Nations as furnishing the only means (1) of providing permanent international security and (2) of enforcing well-defined rules of justice.

It has often been said that at no time was France convinced of the efficacy and the practicability of a League of Nations, but that her only trust was in a permanent alliance of her present allies. However, this assertion is open to grave doubt. During the early weeks of the Peace Conference, there was abundant evidence that French opinion had been whole-heartedly won over to the League of Nations and that it was exerting itself toward the creation of a League which would *actually* provide guarantees. To secure this end her representatives at the Peace Table advanced some very definite proposals. The first of these was for the pooling of that part of the war debt of the Allies which the indemnity could not pay. France believed that if the Allies were sincere in their repeated declarations that

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she had saved the world from ruin, they would agree to apportion equally among themselves the material charges of the war. The second measure to vitalize the League was the proposal to create an international police force, subject to the direction of an international executive. This force would be immediately available for the suppression of illegal international disorder. France did not wish to be placed in the position of fearfully waiting for months—perhaps even years—until her former Allies should decide whether or not to aid her again. These suggestions were both rejected by the Peace Conference, principally because of American opposition. Doubtlessly, President Wilson and his advisors favored them in modified form; but the opposition in the United States had already shown itself so opposed to the creation of any league imposing definite responsibilities upon America that they believed an extension of its powers would mean its total rejection.

The refusal of the Conference, at America's instigation, to create an efficient—in the military sense—league was largely responsible for the exaggeration of French demands based upon the policies of a discredited diplomacy. When some of these demands were in turn rejected (such as the annexation of the left bank of the Rhine), the most violent protests were made by public opinion. These protests were very natural. The League of Nations was acceptable to France only upon the assumption of providing an equally secure guarantee of safety. This substituted promise of guarantees prevented the annexation of the Rhine, which at least seemed to offer temporary security against German aggression. But the final form of the League did not live up to its promised remedies. It offered no positive military guarantee commensurate with the policy it supplanted. Consequently, France felt that her safety had been jeopardized for the empty satisfaction of realizing

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an ideal which America urged in form yet now refused to adopt in fact. It is needless to say that the treatment which the United States Senate accorded the Treaty aroused a further skepticism among Frenchmen as to the real worth of a League of Nations.

The obligations accumulated in the writing of this book are many. My first is due to the Government of the United States. To one who holds Tennyson's "do or die" conception of a soldier, it may seem rather audacious of an enlisted man in the American Expeditionary Forces to have departed beyond the customary fields of guard mount and "K. P." But, at any rate, I am grateful for having had the opportunity to go to France, to do what little I did, and when it was over, to spend four delightful months at the French University of Grenoble. I was there fortunate to find myself in the very heart of France, not the France of Paris, but the France of the Provinces.

I wish to thank the different political organizations in Paris who, by means of personal interviews or through correspondence, very graciously accorded me whatever information I desired.

To Monsieur Chastenet, the editor of the *Droit du Peuple* of Grenoble, a fiery Bolshevik and a late candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, I also owe my thanks. His amiability and kindly spirit somewhat dissipated, I must confess, my natural bourgeois terror of the class struggle and its missionaries.

On the other hand, to Paul Bozon-Verduraz, likewise of Grenoble, a modern knight upholding the ideals of medieval kingship, a sturdy follower of Philippe VIII, I owe much inspiration. Through him, my confidence in republics has been rudely shaken and my prejudices against the doctrine of Divine Right somewhat removed.

Finally, to Madame J. Fournier I am greatly indebted. From the aloof colonial vantage point of Morocco, she

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is able to pass serene judgment upon all the works of human frailty—political and otherwise. To her nothing can be perfect. Although the Republic has its vices, it governs France “pretty well,—just as it is.”

Space does not permit me to name the many friends in America who have given assistance and encouragement in the writing of this book. But I am under especial obligation to Professors Edward S. Corwin, Henry R. Shipman, and Philip Marshall Brown of Princeton University; to Professor Carlton J. H. Hayes of Columbia; to W. P. Cresson and C. L. Barrett. I also am greatly indebted to Stoddard Dewey, Henry Adams Gibbons, and Wm. Morton Fullerton for the kindly interest they have shown in, and the advice they have given upon, a subject concerning which they have a much more profound knowledge than the author.

RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL.

INTRODUCTION

One hundred and forty-two years ago the proud French Monarchy of the Old World came to the active military and naval assistance of thirteen obscure colonies that were struggling in the New World for their freedom and independence. One hundred and thirty-one years ago these colonies put into effect the Constitution of the United States and set up the federal, republican government under which they have since prospered and expanded and grown powerful; and in the same year was inaugurated in France the Great Revolution which, amid terrors and travail, was destined to uproot the hoary traditions and habitual abuses of the old Bourbon monarchy and to plant in European soil the fructifying seeds of modern and contemporary France. No wonder that for more than a century a potent sympathy has existed between the French nation and the people of the United States.

Since the schism of the English-speaking peoples in the eighteenth century, the development of the United States has been, in certain respects, more akin to that of France than to that of England. Present-day France is a country of farmers and business men and laborers, quite devoid of a privileged, land-owning nobility and of a state-supported ecclesiastical establishment; she is a country without a king, a country in which republican institutions and thoroughly democratic practices and the spirit of social equality have taken firm root, a country which has repeatedly been stirred by sincere altruism and lofty idealism. What truer description could be given of outstanding national traits of us Americans?

Despite the community of major interests and ideals,

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there are certain obvious though minor differences between the United States and France. The latter, politically speaking, is a highly centralized state, while the former is a decentralized federation of autonomous commonwealths. Government in the United States is carried on alternately by two well-organized political parties, while in France the existence of multifarious and transitory political groups gives to French public life an appearance of the gravest and most alarming instability of governments and even of policies. Moreover, the French nation is as homogeneous and as long established as the American people are heterogeneous and recently come together, a contrast which accounts in part for the fact that patriotism has more often produced chauvinism among the former than among the latter, and likewise for the fact that the former have been more handicapped, perhaps more victimized, than the latter by tradition and antique usage. Certainly the problems of the appropriate relations between Church and State have harassed Americans less than Frenchmen, and, on the whole their solution has been happier and more just in the United States than in France. Besides it should be noted that France is a relatively small country whose boundaries have always been exposed to attack by powerful neighbors, and that both in 1814-1815 and in 1871 her capital city was captured by military foes. To Americans, inhabiting the richest and widest portion of an isolated continent and never menaced by numerous or greedy neighbors, what has been represented by the French to be merely precautionary has too often appeared to be selfish and glaringly vindictive.

It is the façade of a temple that first arrests the eye—and a façade is not necessarily the index of the beauties and familiarities of the temple's interior. If the average American, before the late war, could have pressed past the obvious external strangeness of France and gotten into the mind and soul of the French people, he would