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FRENCH ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WESTERN ENTENTE

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FOREWORD

At the suggestion of the undersigned, the Centre d'Études de Politique Etrangère* organized a two-day meeting, 21st-22nd June 1951 to discuss the obstacles (economic, political, psychological and otherwise) which stand in the way of whole-hearted French support of the Western entente (as exemplified principally in NATO). The meeting, or seminar, was organized as an academic enterprise under the joint auspices of the Centre d'Études and the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. The membership of the group was French, with the exception of three American auditors, and was composed of civil servants, professors, journalists, trade union officials, and business men. (See attached list of participants). The discussion was conducted in French.

Attached is a précis of the discussion. The general tenor is pessimistic, but certain things must be remembered if the discussion is to be kept in proper perspective. First, most French discussions of politics are marked by skepticism and pessimism; the French are not given to the effervescent optimism of Americans. Second, the Americans who attended these sessions drafted the agenda and purposely put the emphasis on the obstacles which stand in the way of full French participation in NATO and similar international agencies. They did not ask for a balance sheet of assets and liabilities; had they done so, the result of the discussion might have been somewhat less pessimistic. Finally, the French participants were asked to speak with complete candor; this they did, making no effort to paint the picture in bright, rather than sombre, colors.

A few high points in the discussion should be noted:

First, there is a deep-rooted sense of social injustice among French workmen, which leads to a conviction on their part that they have little stake in the nation; in view of this fact, the surprising thing is not that five million Frenchmen voted Communist but that more did not do so.

Second, there is still a considerable body of French opinion which regards German rearmament with suspicion and hostility.

Third, there is great need for a more extensive program of public information on the aims of NATO, ECA, MDAP, and similar programs. There is even greater need for an understanding of American motives and

* French "opposite number" to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York and The Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.

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purposes as regards Europe in general and France in particular (most of the well-informed Frenchmen who took part in this discussion were skeptical that the basic American objective was to prevent the outbreak of general war and equally skeptical that the American intention was to defend Europe, not write it off in the first instance and liberate it afterward. Occupation and subsequent liberation are the principal nightmare of the French).

Fourth, the essential program of public information must be conducted by Frenchmen, not Americans. Only Frenchmen can convince other Frenchmen of the essential soundness of the program which the North Atlantic powers have undertaken. The suspicion of foreign "propaganda" is pathological, and the strength of the Communist propaganda (which certainly is foreign) is that it is carried on by Frenchmen who claim to speak as Frenchmen and seem to appeal to French interests, whatever their true motivation may be.

All French political parties to the right of the Communist are committed to extending the term of military service and to other measures of rearmament (although the Socialists are perhaps less firmly committed than the others). Difficulties will arise over the methods of financing rearmament. And inflation--a measure of which would seem unavoidable--will increase the already severe social strains inherent in the French economic and fiscal structure. It would be a mistake to underestimate the seriousness of the situation which will arise as the tempo of rearmament is stepped up, since there is precious little fat in France to sacrifice to guns. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to discount the possibilities that the French effort will equal or exceed our expectations. Nothing succeeds like success; and as the number of French and Allied combat divisions and combat aircraft increases, the confidence of the French in their ability to survive will have a marked influence on their will to survive.

Edward Mead Earle

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List of Participants
Seminar at Centre d'Études de Politique Etrangere
Paris, 21 - 22 June 1951

- Henry Laugier, former General Secretary, Deputy to the Economic and Social Council
(Conseil économique et social)
- Raymond Aron, Diplomatic Correspondent, Le Figaro
- Pierre Besse, General Secretary for the National Credit Council
(Conseil National du Crédit)
- George Boris, Permanent Delegate for France, ~~Office European Economic Cooperation~~ Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva)
(Commission Economique pour l'Europe)
- Jean-Jacques Chevallier, Professor of the Faculty of Law, University of Paris
- Maurice Duverger, Professor of Law and Political Science, University of Bordeaux
- Charles Lucet, Chief of the Bureau for Cultural Exchange of the General Committee for Cultural Relations
(Service des Échanges Culturels à la Direction Générale des Relations Culturelles)
- Jean Gottmann, Geographer, Professor in the Institut d'Études Politiques, University of Paris.
- Maurice Megret, agrégé de l'Université. l'Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale (Institute of Advanced Studies for National Defense)
- G. Passe, of the Ferrous Metals Labor Union,
(Chambre Syndicale de la Sidérurgie)
- Noel Poudroux, Director General of the Scientific Organization Committee (Commission Générale d'Organisation Scientifique);
Editor, Sondages, a quarterly of the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique
- L. Rosenstock-Franck, Director of Prices in the Office of National Economy
(Directeur des Prix au Ministère de l'Économie Nationale)

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Pierre Uri, Plans Commissariat
(Commissariat au Plan)

G. Ventéjol, Membership Secretary, Confédération Général du Travail-
Force Ouvrière
(General Labor Confederation)

Paul Vignaux, Director of Studies, Ecole des Hautes Études

Jacques Vernant, Secretary-General, Centre de'Etudes de Politique
Etrangère

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SEMINAR ON FRENCH ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WESTERN ENTENTE

The seminar sponsored by the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton and the Centre d'Etudes de Politique Etrangere, held at Paris on June 21-22 1951, took as its general topic: "French attitudes with respect to the western entente". The discussions concerned the obstacles in the way of whole-hearted French participation in the Western Alliance and tended to polarize around three major points:

- A. Attitudes of the French working-class toward the western entente.
- B. French attitudes toward Germany as a partner in the western entente.
- C. Economic and social factors which are likely to influence French attitudes toward the west.

Attitudes of the French Working-Class Toward the Western Entente

Only two sectors of French society, observed one member of the seminar, are deeply divided on the question of French participation in a western grouping: The working-class and the intellectuals. The participants agreed, therefore, that it would be most useful to concentrate on the attitudes of those sectors during the first session of the seminar. (In fact, the intellectuals were almost completely bypassed in the discussions which followed).

A trade-union official pointed out that Force Ouvriere had made its decision in favor of a western bloc as long ago as 1947, when the organi-

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zation split away from the CGT. He admitted that FO has not been able to convert either the Communist militants in the CGT (who constitute an "amorphous mass" which accepts party slogans and cannot or will not examine them critically) or the bulk of non-Communist trade unionists who have long since accepted the leadership of the experienced and able CGT cadres. He stressed the difficulty of building up rival cadres except over a period of many years, and insisted on the primacy of economic and social problems over political and international problems in the workingman's mind.

Members of the seminar raised the question of the workers' reaction to Communist propaganda on foreign policy issues. The same trade-union official expressed the opinion that FO and CFTC (Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) elements are not influenced in any positive way by such Communist arguments. He stated specifically that the non-Communist workers, unlike the intellectuals, have not been affected by Communist propaganda concerning the Korean war or the MacArthur controversy. He admitted, however, that some FO members regard the Atlantic Pact as a mechanism created to serve the United States alone. A representative of a firm of consulting engineers cited the results of a recent Sondages poll showing that 39% of the workers regard the United States as currently the chief threat to peace, while only 36% attribute that role to Russia. A lesser proportion (27%) said they would sympathize with Russia in the event of a general war, while 36% declared they would sympathize with the United States and 20% gave no reply. After some further discussion, it

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was concluded that while the positive effects of Communist foreign policy propaganda have been small, the negative effects upon the workers have been very great: the effect has been to implant widespread confusion and doubt. It was pointed out, for example, that a large majority of the workers are thoroughly confused about the origins and accomplishments of the Marshall Plan. (Over half of those polled some time ago selected "America's need for foreign markets" as the principal motive for the Marshall Plan).

A second trade-union representative introduced a somewhat different note, by stressing the fundamentally anti-capitalist instincts of most French workers, whether within or outside the CGT. Their attitude toward the Atlantic pact, he contended, is closely interlinked with this sentimental heritage. The average worker has no understanding of American-type capitalism; "he regards Paul Reynaud as representative both of capitalism and of the west in general." The fact that visiting American capitalists denounce the shortcomings of French capitalists only confirms the workers in their sense of grievance; it does not convince them that there are two types of capitalism. As a result of this basic anti-capitalism, even some of those workers who vote for the Center parties (e.g., MRP) do not support the Atlantic pact policy. Furthermore, the views of top trade union leaders do not necessarily reflect the views of the rank and file (e.g., the CFTC's official support of the Strasbourg efforts at European unity). The workers in general are much more interested in British problems and examples than in the United

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States model; they see a closer analogy between British and French problems, and besides the British experiment appeals to their anti-capitalist prejudices. The further point was made that those workers who believe that the western world "has a mission" are hampered by a constant sense of being on the defensive. (As one member put it, "one party sings the praises of Russia, the other doesn't say too much that is bad about the United States").

The trade-union official's remark that "every question except one leaves the workers cold--and that one exception is wages"--set off a considerable discussion which illustrated the difficulty of examining foreign policy attitudes without constant reference to social-economic conditions and issues of social justice. One participant cited the results of recent polls on morale factors in industry undertaken on behalf of UNESCO; he showed that the wage issue always ranked first in France except in the case of one relatively high-wage plant. In American factories, on the other hand, the wage issue usually stood well down the list of morale factors. He also observed that French productivity missions to the United States fail to win over the workers and, indeed, even boomerang in many cases. Workers who return with favorable impressions and new ideas are accused of having sold out to the capitalists; owners who propose new methods are suspected of aiming at higher profits and a reduced labor force. Productivity missions to countries like Switzerland or Sweden have had a much deeper impact than those sent to the United States. Even CGT

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workers return from those countries full of enthusiasm and new ideas; and they continue to preach the new gospel even when the CGT takes sanctions against them. In the United States, on the other hand, the worker carries an ingrained prejudice produced by suspicion of American "imperialism" and resentment against a rich nation which "thinks it can buy Europe". Members of the seminar disagreed as to whether French workers are impressed by the high living standards of American workers (symbolized by ownership of a car). A great many appear to be attracted by the idea that in Russia the worker is the master, whether or not he has a car.

Part of the responsibility for the coolness of the working class toward the west was attributed to American errors. Various members of the seminar felt that the motives and achievements of the Marshall plan, for example, should have been explained to the workers by the French Government and not by direct United States propaganda efforts. Sometimes this propaganda has been inept (e.g., AFL pamphlets depicting an American paradise to counterbalance the Soviet paradise). But more significant is the fact that the whole western bloc idea has come to be regarded as an American policy, and has not been sold to Frenchmen as a French policy. France, they feel, has become a battleground between two alien policies, neither of which grows directly out of French needs. This dead end might have been avoided, according to certain participants, if the United States had refrained from direct propaganda activity designed to win French gratitude and to prove the purity of American aims. The result of such

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abstinence might have been the growth of a deeper and more genuine sense of gratitude after some decades' delay.

Some brief references were made to the attitudes of other social classes in France. It was pointed out, for example, that any general sense of hostility to the "American way of life" is confined to intellectuals and the middle class, and is not to be found among the workers. One seminar member suggested in this connection that more might be done to make the cultural and ideological aspects of American life known in France, along with the usual stress on technical and economic achievements. The point was also made that American policy on visa cases (e.g., Maurice Chevalier, Philippe Lamosar) has a lamentable effect in France, where a great many intellectuals and civil servants had close connections with the Communists during the Popular Front era. !

With respect to the peasantry, it was remarked that maps of Communist (and anti-American) sentiment coincide closely with maps of maquis activity during the resistance period. It was also observed that Communist hostility to the west in rural areas often tends to link up with the heritage of Gaullist resentment toward America dating from the Giraud-Yalta era. This combination of Communist-Gaullist hostility has been strengthened somewhat by the effort of ex-Vichyites to gain American sympathy - an effort which some Frenchmen believe has been at least partially successful.

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French Attitudes Toward Germany As a Partner in the Western Entente

Discussion of this topic brought out a range of opinions which were more positive yet far more contradictory. The members of the seminar did not agree on what Germany might do once she becomes strong; but most of them did agree that Germany cannot be trusted with power unless kept in tutelage somehow. They also showed a tendency to doubt whether American policy-makers had adequately weighed the risks involved in rearming Germany.

A leading French political scientist opened the discussion by categorizing French fears of a strong Germany (fear of German dominance of the west, fear that the Germans might seek reunification by force, fear that German rearmament might provoke Russia). He observed nevertheless that the Center parties in considerable part are prepared to accept German rearmament, as is De Gaulle's RPF. The Communists are left as heirs of the old line Bainville thesis that Germany is the hereditary enemy--a thesis that has won them much sympathy in rural France. He expressed some doubt as to the United States' desire to prevent rather than to win a war, and as to American determination (in the event war comes) to defend rather than to liberate western Europe. "Only the survivors win a war; but Europe next time won't be among the survivors," he remarked. He argued that the west should attempt to reunite Germany by agreement, since Germany as now constituted is not permanently viable, and the irredentism pro-

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duced by division must sooner or later bring war.

This thesis was questioned in various ways by several other members of the seminar. A prominent journalist contended that the idea of reunification by agreement is totally unrealistic; that such a proposal at present comes either too soon or too late. He recalled the French government's rejection of a proposal to that effect advanced by Mr. Kennan in 1948 or 1949, when it might have succeeded. A civil servant contended that France's major aim should be to prevent the reconstitution of a national Germany; that somehow Germany must be integrated into something bigger. He rejected as illusory the idea of turning Germany into an un-armed buffer state between east and west. A university professor pointed out that in view of the Pan-German tradition, irredentism might well continue even if the two halves of Germany were reunited. An American participant expressed his conviction that every important American policy-maker, whether civilian or military, seeks first of all to prevent war through strength, and proposes in case war comes to defend rather than liberate western Europe. (Several members of the group expressed hope that these assurances about United States policy might somehow be brought home to French opinion at large, in order to dissipate the widespread mal entendu which exists on both points).

Efforts by the members of the seminar to gauge general public opinion toward Germany were admittedly based on intuition rather than scientific measurement. To some, anti-German sentiment in France is still widespread and deep; others were struck by the weakness of anti-German feeling so soon after the defeat and the occupation. Most members agreed, however, that German collaboration with western Europe must be assured somehow. They

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agreed too that the 1950 proposals to rearm Germany were premature, since they came at a time when there were no arms to give, when the Germans could use the rearmament issue for bargaining purposes, and when "safer" countries had not been assured of an arms priority. Two participants warned that the possibility of a German agreement with Russia in an effort to recover German primacy is not to be counted out; another observed that some Frenchmen fear, on the contrary, an aggressive anti-Russian policy by a resurgent Germany.

An American participant remarked that all of the doubts and uncertainties expressed during the discussion had been raised just as clearly by Americans when German rearmament was being examined in 1950. He pointed out, however, that these risks had been weighed against the risks involved in other policies or in no policy; and that, in the American view, it is simply a question of where the greater risks lie.

Economic and Social Factors Likely to Influence French
Attitudes Toward the West

From this final phase of the discussion, there emerged a general sentiment of concern and even of pessimism. Most of the participants felt that social stresses and economic inequities are already serious in France, and that the impact of rearmament is certain to intensify these difficulties. The effect on the nation's unity and morale may be severe enough to hamper France's participation in the western bloc.

A trade-union official pointed out that during the past twenty years at least, every wage rise won by the workers has quickly been absorbed by price rises. Furthermore, the workers are not convinced that increased productivity will automatically improve their status; rather, they feel that it will mean nothing more than higher profits for the owners. The

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non-Communist unions have therefore turned to the sliding-scale wage formula, based both on prices and on levels of production. The sliding-scale principle has already been accepted psychologically if not legally; there is a potential strike movement each time that prices rise.

A second union representative insisted that rank-and-file trade unionists already labor under a deep sense of disillusionment. They feel that so long as the French industrial and commercial structure continues to be highly cartellized, labor can make no serious gains. One result is the radicalization of the CFTC's left wing; another is the conviction that labor has no control over inflationary processes, and can do nothing more than try to keep up through automatic wage increases from time to time. For a whole series of reasons, the non-Communist labor organizations are without strength; only the Communists seem to have a solution. The non-Communist wage earners are so frustrated by this sense of weakness that in a period of crisis, an anarchical situation could result.

A high civil servant foresaw serious repercussions from the shift away from Marshall plan goals (higher living standards) to rearmament. To finance rearmament without dangerous inflation will be an almost insoluble problem for the new Assembly. He recalled with approval the principle advanced some time ago by Pierre Mendès-France: "on ne peut pas tout faire". The formula is at last being taken up by party leaders (e.g., Socialists, MRP); but the Center parties cannot bring themselves to set up a list of priorities and to make a drastic choice. He suggested another possibility--a redistribution of income through fiscal reform. But here too he foresaw an impasse: the only elements which are heavily

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avored by present fiscal arrangements (farmers and small business) constitute the bulk of the anti-Communist forces in France and, in addition, have just won the elections. Serious fiscal reform would therefore disrupt the whole social structure. The only alternative is inflation, rising food prices, growing discontent. The future, in the opinion of this member of the seminar, is heavily mortgaged.

A second civil servant agreed with this general analysis, although he felt that some improvement could be made if future governments were courageous enough to fight certain demagogic slogans. He cited statistics on agricultural prices and incomes to show that the farmers have made notable gains since 1948 at the expense of labor; this fact he contrasted with misleading pre-election statistics used to attract the farm vote. He suggested too that the United States Government could do more than it already has to keep down the cost to France of essential raw materials. Social security constitutes a heavy burden, yet unlike the British system it does not redistribute income in favor of those elements who have been lowest in the scale. He concluded that since fiscal reform is unlikely and since not much more in the way of taxes can be gotten from the working class, the cost of rearmament will be paid by those who already carry their full tax load--civil servants, employees of nationalized industry, etc. He raised the question whether these elements might not then be attracted to Communism.

Some effort to introduce a more optimistic note was made by two members of the seminar (one American and one French). They suggested that out of current difficulties it might be possible to carry through some

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basic changes in the French economic structure; that considerable investment of foreign capital in France and in the overseas areas (if France were to admit such capital) might result in rationalization and increased production, which could absorb much of the cost of rearmament and could allow a simultaneous rise in living standards. The success of Anglo-American productivity teams was cited as an example which might be followed.

Most of the participants, however, remained skeptical. A civil servant observed that the most likely result of optimistic paper plans is a greater degree of disillusionment. The question of economic and social progress is not merely technical but essentially political, he insisted; and inertia is greatest in the very circles which are most anti-Communist. A trade-union representative felt that arms production in France would inevitably be inflationary unless whole new factories could be imported to replace the present small high-cost plants. A consulting engineer placed much responsibility at the door of the industrial elite which does not measure up to its responsibilities and which resists progress and expansion. He and other participants stressed the lack of mobility in a social structure so essentially artisan and corporative as that of France. With few examples of social mobility before them, workers as well as owners tend to be short-sighted and to be primarily concerned with protecting a situation acquire.

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It is only fair to observe in conclusion that if the tone of the seminar discussions was often pessimistic and critical, and if the principal

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stress was on difficulties and weaknesses, this result was in large part inspired by the agenda presented by the American participants. The latter were mainly concerned with getting at the problems and preoccupations of Frenchmen with respect to France's role in the western bloc; they were not seeking an accurate balance between assets and liabilities. In this effort the French participants cooperated dispassionately, candidly, and generously.

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