

FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY

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SINCE the war, France has frequently been criticised on the ground that her policy is preventing the consolidation of peace and the reconciliation of enmities in Europe. Yet even a superficial acquaintance with France to-day is sufficient to reveal her sincere desire to establish permanent peace. She is still acutely conscious of the horrors of war; she realizes that her present prosperity is mainly the result of a financial policy which has impoverished whole classes of her citizens; she is not blind to the fact that the settlement at Versailles was very favourable to her, and that she could only lose by a renewal of war. Indeed it is too often forgotten by her critics that it is only by preventing the recurrence of war that France can hope to retain her present position in Europe.

The French have, however, a different conception of the methods of preserving peace from that which commends itself to Anglo-Saxons. There has never been any large body of French opinion favourable to the League of Nations; it was accepted reluctantly, as the price of American assistance in the war. When the United States refused to join, the French interpreted the American conduct as another example of Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy. Until Germany was admitted, however, France regarded the League of Nations without actual disfavor; but, in the opinion of a majority of Frenchmen, a League of which Germany was an equal member could not be seriously considered as a safeguard of peace. There was a complete lack of enthusiasm in France for the so-called Kellogg pact. The French saw no practical value in it; it merely expressed a pious hope, which there was no object in expressing except as the preliminary step to the creation of some concrete machinery to prevent war. The Frenchman considers that the undesirability of war is so obvious that it does not need to be stated. At first, many Frenchmen hoped the United States might agree to sanctions, and the refusal to do so is regarded as another manifestation of insincerity. For, with inconsiderable exceptions, the French are agreed that permanent peace can be based only on positive security. This very insistence on security reveals the state of mind which determines French foreign policy; it is an attitude of suspicion and fear. In some Frenchmen this attitude

is undefined, instinctive, a doubt of the ability of France to maintain her existing pre-eminence; in most of them it is a clearly defined and frequently expressed mistrust of Germany. It is lack of confidence in the future, and that alone, which explains the persistent demand for security. Of course, not all Frenchmen interpret security alike, and an examination of French politics and parties is a necessary preliminary to an appreciation of these different interpretations.

The confusion of parties, and of party names, and the frequent changes of government have combined to bewilder many foreign observers, and to obscure the realities of French politics. This instability of government might better be described as mobility; a change in government does not involve a dissolution of parliament, as it usually does in England, and, not having to fear an election, the deputies feel much freer to vote against the ministry when they do not like a particular measure. All French parties are small and loosely organized, with little or no party discipline, and the deputies frequently vote according to their own inclinations. What is lost in stability is, in great part, gained in sensitiveness to currents of opinion.

The seats in the French Chamber of Deputies are arranged in a semi-circle, with the ministers sitting in the centre of the front row, and this arrangement is responsible for the use of the terms Right, Centre, and Left, which are now applied in all European countries to political groups, depending on whether they are conservative, moderate, or radical in their tendencies. These terms are particularly confusing because parties which formerly sat in the Left have become moderate, and moved to the Centre or even to the Right without changing their names.

There are, however, beneath the almost meaningless party designations, certain fairly clear divisions of political opinion. At the extreme left is the Communist Party, affiliated with the Third International in Moscow, still an insignificant minority in the Chamber, and strong only in certain working-class quarters of Paris and the great industrial towns. The Communists have never supported any of the Governments since the war, and have exercised no direct influence on French policy. Next to them are the Socialists, or to give them the more correct title: "Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière" (S. F. I. O.). These Socialists have retained their affiliation with the Second International, and are in consequence sympathetic towards the German Socialists and favourable to reconciliation with Germany. The rise of Communism has put French Socialism on the defensive, and despite considerable numerical strength the Socialists have refused to exercise an influence

on policy proportionate to their numbers, because they feared contact with and contamination by the bourgeois parties. Although their votes kept the ministries of the Left in office from 1924 to 1926, they refused to co-operate in the Government and to share responsibility for its programme.

To the right of the Socialists there are at least ten groups with a great variety of names which have ceased to signify very much, and there are numerous independents as well. However, two general tendencies are clearly discernible. These may be called either the Left and the Right, the Radicals and the Nationalists, or, on the English analogy, the Liberals and the Conservatives. Between these two is the amorphous Centre, composed of several small groups which oscillate from one tendency to another. As neither Right nor Left ever has a clear majority, the Centre is necessarily represented in all ministries. The principal group of the Left is the *Parti Radical et Radical-Socialiste*, which is the largest group in the Chamber. Radicals regard themselves as the simon-pure republicans, indeed as the only group which really represents genuine French republicanism, and the achievements of the Great Revolution. They are anti-clerical, closely associated with Freemasonry, and, through that Order, have controlled the civil service for nearly half a century. Despite the advantage of their undoubted republicanism, the Radicals are losing ground in common with nineteenth century Liberal parties all over Europe, and losing for the same reason that Liberalism is declining elsewhere, and notably in England, because their programme is one rather of achievement than of promise. The elections of 1924 may probably have been their last triumph. Particularly among the young, the drift from their ranks to Socialism is very marked. Although the transition to Socialism is slower in France than in England or Germany, because it is more difficult for peasant proprietors than workmen to make it, yet the transition is being made steadily in the south, which was the great stronghold of Radicalism before the war. The more prosperous peasants of the north, on the contrary, tend more and more to support the Centre or even the Right.

To the right of the Radical Left, party or group lines become even less distinct. The half-dozen groups such as the Republican Socialists, the Social and Radical Left, the Republicans of the Left, the Popular Democrats, the Democratic Republican Union, shade into one another. It is impossible to say where the Centre ends and the Right begins, and, as the names suggest, most of these groups originally sat in the Left, but have gradually become more

Conservative, as the republican régime has become more firmly established. They include a considerable number of Catholics who have become reconciled to the republic. The groups of the Right and Right Centre represent the materials out of which a compact Conservative republican party may ultimately be welded. M. Poincaré, despite his Radical and anti-clerical past, looked more and more to them for support in his successive ministries; and they have been the most dependable supporters of M. Tardieu, whose personal position is rather farther to the Right. At the same time both M. Poincaré and M. Tardieu have had to depend on the votes of the Centre to make up their majorities, just as M. Herriot and the Radicals did in 1924. This key position has made M. Briand and M. Painlevé almost indispensable to all ministries whether of Right or Left.

On the extreme right are about twenty deputies who are hostile to the republican régime. They represent a remnant of the old royalist parties, and by employing the term *Conservative* they have made it a description which no loyal republican can use. They do not represent the full strength of anti-republican sentiment in France, since the great majority of royalists have abstained from participation in political life under the republic.

Up to a point, these fairly distinguishable political tendencies, which underlie the apparent confusion of French parties, represent divergences of view on foreign policy. The Communists may be dismissed in a word; they desire a social revolution, and are co-operating with Moscow to that end. Their influence is negligible. The Socialists have maintained consistently that the wise policy for France is reconciliation with Germany, to be followed by disarmament. They would accept international good-feeling and the machinery of the League of Nations as sufficient guarantees of French security. They are the only French party which wholeheartedly supports the League of Nations.

On the other hand, the policy of the Nationalist Right has been equally clear and consistent. They recognize how favourable the treaty of Versailles was to France, and they desire to maintain the *status quo* in Europe. They have patronized the Little Entente, involving as it has done an even more complete military encirclement of Germany than that which existed in 1914. They wish to maintain unimpaired the military strength of France. They desired a defensive alliance with Great Britain and the United States after the war, and they were reluctant to give up the military security involved in the occupation of the Rhineland. In a word, they insist upon taking all measures necessary for the security of

France and they will not admit that there can be any security in a reconciliation with Germany. Their mistrust of the Germans is too profound for that. They see perpetual evidence of bad faith in the endless denials of the war guilt which the Germans admitted at Versailles. Denial now to the Frenchman seems merely a refusal to admit the obvious. In the opinion of the Nationalists the Germans disclaim their responsibility for the war in order to evade the obligations based on it, and they contrast the German attitude since 1919 with the conduct of France after 1815, and again after 1870, when she faithfully met the obligations which defeat forced upon her. It is true that the cases are not comparable, but the ordinary Frenchman does not realize that. Consequently the Right does not demand security in an abstract sense, but security specifically against German faithlessness. Unless that point is clearly grasped, it is impossible to understand French policy. The Right sees only two methods of obtaining this security, either by armaments or by a defensive alliance, or even better, by the combination of both. Indeed, the more discerning realize that armaments alone are not sufficient, and that is why France has never cut herself entirely adrift from British policy, and has reluctantly consented to many expedients of which she heartily disapproves. To put it candidly, the Nationalists do not dare to sacrifice English friendship. Undoubtedly they would be as ready to-day as they were in 1919 to sacrifice a great part of their military organization for a defensive alliance with Great Britain and the United States.

The policy of the Left and the Left Centre is less clear-cut and easy to define than the policy of the Socialists or that of the Nationalists. Before the war there were elements in the Radical party favourable to a reduction of armaments and to friendship with Germany. After 1919, however, the Radicals were carried along by the Nationalist current, and it was only after the failure of Poincaré's policy of firmness, as exemplified in the occupation of the Ruhr, that the Radicals began to incline toward the Socialist policy of attempting a reconciliation with Germany. The Radicals were neither unanimously nor enthusiastically in favour of such a policy, but they were influenced by the failure of Poincaré, by the strained relations with England over the Ruhr, and by the better spirit in Germany manifested in the negotiations which produced the Dawes plan. The Radicals quite naturally attributed their success in the elections of 1924 to a popular reaction from the Nationalist policy, and the ministry formed by M. Herriot adopted a more conciliatory attitude toward Germany; an attitude which secured for them

enough Socialist votes to keep them in office without support from the Right. But even the Herriot ministry was willing to go only a short distance in trusting the Germans, as M. Herriot showed in his speech on the tenth anniversary of the battle of the Marne, in which he said, "I shall be greatly astonished if the importance of this celebration does not cause some humiliation among those who pretend that it was Belgium who leaped at Germany's throat." And it was the same M. Herriot who, by the protocol drawn up at Geneva in 1924, attempted to secure a perpetual guarantee of the territorial arrangements made at Versailles. In other words, the Radicals, like the Right, appreciated the desirability of maintaining a European *status quo*, and M. Herriot's reluctance to trust Germany is strong evidence of the wide-spread suspicion of the Germans which prevails in France. The Radicals have been just as insistent on security as the Nationalists, but, unlike the deputies of the Right, they have been inclined to place a limited confidence in German good faith, and to recognize that the League of Nations is useful in reducing international friction.

In practice, foreign policy has corresponded fairly closely with the views of the Centre, and more particularly their leading exponent, M. Briand, who has been foreign minister almost continuously since the war, regardless of whether the ministry had a tendency to the Right or to the Left. This situation would have been impossible with a clearly defined party system, and it illustrates admirably the flexibility of French government. M. Briand is able, although often with some difficulty, to blend elements of both Radical and Nationalist views into a single policy which, with a slight shifting of emphasis, serves for both, and succeeds in preserving continuity. He accepts the necessity of security for France, without pointing too specifically at Germany. He agrees with the Right that English friendship is essential, and with the Left that reconciliation with Germany is desirable. Even his personal desire for an increased recognition of European solidarity is based on the generally accepted policy of preserving the existing distribution of power in Europe. This does not mean that he is not forced to yield somewhat to pressure from his colleagues, since French ministries are always coalitions and, consequently, always compromises.

It might be said that, except for the international parties, the Communists and the Socialists, the objects of foreign policy are agreed upon by all parties. There is, in France to-day, no party of expansion, such as Fascismo in Italy, or the National Socialists (Hitlerites) in Germany. What M. André Siegfried says

in his recent book on the parties is true of all French opinion. "War does not mean an expedition abroad; it means Invasion."

Both Right and Left wish to preserve the *status quo* in Europe, and to insure France against attack. They differ only in the means they would use. This has been well illustrated by the ministries in office since the elections of 1924. It is true that the ministry of the Left, presided over by M. Herriot, agreed to accept the Dawes plan and to recall the French troops from the Ruhr, but it insisted upon reserving for France the right of independent action if Germany failed to keep her agreement. M. Herriot was also the father of the abortive Geneva protocol, which was carefully calculated to consolidate the position of France and her allies, and to prevent any revision of treaties. That protocol was plainly a measure of security for France, although the security was to come through the League of Nations. The essence of the Locarno pacts of 1925 was also the provision of security. The Locarno agreement was attacked by many of the journals of the Right because it involved the recognition of German good-faith, and the admission of Germany to the League of Nations. The more responsible leaders of the Right criticized it because it did not go far enough. They did not consider that France would be warranted in taking any serious steps toward disarming until the British and Italian guarantees were followed up by military conventions. However acceptable to the parties of the Left, Locarno did not signify real security to the Right; and the agreement had scarcely been reached before M. Poincaré came into office, and began to look towards the Right for support. The strength of the parties of the Right was materially increased in the elections of 1928. Since then, the suspicion of Germany has grown with the growth of German Nationalist feeling. Both M. Poincaré and M. Tardieu represent the specific demand for security against the German attack. Both interpret security as dependent jointly on armaments and on English friendship, while each of these two items of French security is pushed to the limit where it begins to endanger the other, and sometimes perhaps a little beyond. It was to preserve the good-will of England that the French agreed to admit Germany to the League, to accept the Young plan, and to evacuate the Rhineland. On the other hand, the belief in the necessity of armaments explains the failure of the recent naval conference, as well as the great scheme of frontier fortifications, which, it should be insisted, would be quite useless in aggressive warfare, but might be of considerable value in defence.

Recent events have increased the conviction that the more France concedes to Germany the more Germany will demand, and

the more offensive will be her attitude. The French advocates of firmness insist that the Germans interpret a conciliatory policy as a sign of weakness, and that firmness is the only policy which will reassure a France nervously apprehensive of the nightmare of invasion. This is the view of the Right, but the Left has said little recently about reconciliation with Germany, and the alarmist view is certain to be widespread as long as Germany's conduct remains provocative. The French desire peace, but all Frenchmen demand that France must be secured against invasion, and most Frenchmen also demand a policy calculated to maintain the present eminence of their country.