
Book Review

On the centennial of de Gaulle's birth and on the 'American de Gaulle'

by Katherine Kanter

Avec de Gaulle: 25 ans avec le Général de Gaulle

by Pierre Lefranc

Editions Presses Pocket, Paris, 1990

405 page, paperbound, 30 French francs

"De Gaulle was an incurable pessimist, some people say. . . . On the contrary, de Gaulle bore within him the most powerful optimism. . . . He took the course of history head-on; facing her down, he managed to force her to change her course. And yet, that history had already been written, or very nearly; he erased the page, and traced out a new path."—*Pierre Lefranc*

Pierre Lefranc's memoirs of his quarter century with de Gaulle have just been reissued in paperback, this being the 100th anniversary of de Gaulle's birth, the 50th of the "Appel du 18 juin" which launched the Resistance, and, this Nov. 9, the 20th of his death. Lefranc was one of the Free French under the War, and became a close associate of de Gaulle from the Liberation to de Gaulle's death. His memoirs give some insights into what has gone wrong in France since de Gaulle was thrown out in 1969.

Hours after General Aoun capitulated to Syria last month, Jacques Toubon, the spokesman for the RPR, which is the successor to the Gaullist Party, spoke on French national radio: "It is a big step forward. Now France, which has interests in the region, can get down to negotiating with Syria and the United States, a real independence for Lebanon." Does such betrayal mean de Gaulle's life was a failure?

If these people are "Gaullists," then Gaullism appears to be deader than a doorknob in France. But without de Gaulle, would there have been Enrico Mattei or Indira Gandhi? Was not Gamel Abdul Nasser, in his own strange way, a Gaullist?

Let us look at Lefranc's lines, referring to the incident in 1941 when "the English realized that the circumstances under which they were to enter Syria and Lebanon alongside the Free French, was the chance to finally succeed in gaining

supremacy over the region." Then de Gaulle, to the absolute horror of almost all his associates, gave the English a deadline, beyond which the agreement between the Free French and their cumbersome allies would be broken, should England not leave her claims. From Beirut de Gaulle wrote (Aug. 13, 1941) "Our greatness and our strength lie only in compromising nothing where France's rights are concerned, and there will be no compromise, before we reach the Rhine."

Then, as now! In reply to questions put to him by a French journalist on France's inaction before the fall of Lebanon, Lyndon LaRouche, from his prison, commented: "It's capitulation, that's all it is. Everybody in France who has any sense knows that, that this is worse than 1956. . . . In the present crisis, had de Gaulle been alive, the English would have tried to shoot him first because de Gaulle would have been de Gaulle. . . . France would have told the Anglo-Americans to get out of the Middle East, he would have done everything to wreck the British economy and wreck the British. He would have looked at the policy that Paris has played in this thing, and he would have said, this is Suez 1956."

Of all the great protagonists of World War II, only de Gaulle acted, not as a spokesman for a social class or imperial cliques, but in the interests of mankind. The elite of the Anglo-Saxon world, from the abdicated English King to the Duke of Westminster on down, were shareholders in Hitler's enterprise, not just politically or financially, but philosophically. So much so, that when the Anglo-Saxons belatedly decided their home turf was at risk, England hastily set up against all eventualities a bicephalic monarchy—the one, George VI, as the anti-Hitler, the other, pro-Hitler, Edward the Abdicant, in the Bahamas, an excellent outpost from which to review supply routes from South America to the Nazi war effort. In the early 1930s, as Churchill made pro-Hitler speeches to the English Parliament, as John Maynard Keynes wrote in praise of Hjalmar Schacht, as Roosevelt's social set were financing eugenics programs and backing Hitler to the hilt, de Gaulle risked his military career by speaking out against the Nazi Party and warning of the war to come.

This is well-documented in Lefranc's pages on de Gaulle's struggle, before war was even mooted, to change the path upon which the French elite was so disastrously engaged. Lefranc points to this bourgeoisie as utterly self-righteous, elegantly anti-Semitic, and xenophobic except where the Anglo-Saxons are concerned. They suffered little under the War, and smoothly made the transition to the Liberation, losing nothing of their wealth and privilege. He writes: "The ruling bourgeoisie failed the nation. [It] rejected those who transgress its fundamental conventions, which is what De Gaulle did. . . . When a Maréchal tells you we're beaten, we're beaten. . . . To blame the high Civil Service for dealing with the enemy is 'unfair.' De Gaulle's action was the jarring note in the concert of 'My boy, finish your studies first, then we can talk about the fate of France.' "

The greatest strength of Lefranc's memoirs, is his lucidity about the motives and aims of those forces which struck such an uneasy alliance with France during the War, but yet threaten her existence in the most fundamental way, as now with the Gulf war: "De Gaulle never forgot what hardship it had meant for France, after 1918, to wrongly put the interest of her allies before her own. He had thought over the work of destruction wrought by England's moral sway over our politics; he kept ever in mind the disastrous authority which the Foreign Office enjoyed, the only aim of which had been, over centuries, to make sure no organized force independent of England ever emerged in Europe; that he saw as the origin of most of the evils which had befallen France. . . . And there is a Foreign Party in France; there are masses of businessmen, journalists, politicians, who put their trust only in what comes from abroad. . . . Thanks to its power, its seeming liberalism, the United States has sucked into its wake a teeming clientele, fascinated by how tall the skyscrapers are, or by IBM's year-end results, and which ends up by thinking that Wall Street, and the street of Liberty are one and the same." And further: "This de Gaulle could not abide in the Americans: while their words spoke of magnificent democratic principles, their deeds rested on the formula: Might makes Right."

In the interview quoted above, Mr. LaRouche refers to that selfsame problem: "If the Gulf operation succeeds, the British and the Americans will destroy Western continental Europe, reduce Eurasia to a mess, and destroy Japan. They know they can only do this in a window of opportunity. In the Middle East, that's one year or so. The policy has been on the books for a long time—for example, the war with Argentina. . . . This is a long-range policy drift of the Anglo-Americans, the out-of-area deployment, the North-South wars. Once the U.S.S.R. began to crumble, they decided they were going to do this if they could."

Lefranc was ever a follower, not a great leader, and he tends to cut his subject down to size. When things get complex, after 1958, his mind tends to go into "systems overload," but on the War and the years preceding it, few can

read his account without trembling before the depth of de Gaulle's thought, his lucidity and courage. In Lefranc's words:

"Military men are judged by their courage under fire. Error. They should really be judged by their courage in confronting their superiors and with accepted ideas. De Gaulle had that kind of courage. Furthermore, his impudence, his insistence on putting his ideas down in articles and lectures, made him the black sheep of the army. . . . Everything possible was done to stop him from being promoted. . . . De Gaulle never lost that feeling of revolt when faced with passive acceptance. Until his last day, his last thought, he knew he was attacked and insulted because, unlike others, he never bowed to events by calling them 'fate.' "

On Anglo-American designs to rule the postwar world, I would tend to think that Mr. Lefranc's treatment, though perceptive, fails to get across the evil of what was on the cards. "The American President had little respect for old Europe, the reign of which, in his view, was done. He thought little of France . . . [which] after her defeat, he wanted contrite, repentant like a decadent nation which has been taught a good lesson. . . . Furthermore, Roosevelt was under pressure from American public opinion, especially the Protestant majority in his country. The Federal Council of the Protestant elites was especially concerned about colonized peoples. These champions of independence, very well informed by their missionaries in Africa, energetically called for an international organization to exercise control over those Third World nations, should control be necessary. As though by accident, the head of that Federal Council was Mr. John Foster Dulles, who happened to be Roosevelt's Secretary of State [sic]. Shall one wonder then that these idealists seize upon the chance presented by the War and our reverses, to question France's rights to her empire? How could one lonely general in London even think of standing up against a design so grandiose, so humanitarian? At that time, which fairly dripped with morality, the American leaders had not yet discovered the system of colonization by the dollar."

What was this evil? In the late 1970s, this reviewer was able for some weeks to examine documents drawn from the minutes of the wartime Council of Ministers of England, relative to the postwar order which England and the United States planned to impose on Western Europe. These documents are held in the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris, because UNESCO, an Orwellian project if there ever was one, grew directly out of those plans. I could scarcely believe what I was reading: As war raged in Europe, England and the United States, in 1941-42, were already planning to use the destruction of war to put all schools in Europe under Anglo-Saxon command; all schoolbooks would be centrally dictated and written. Cinema, radio, theater, would be centrally controlled. France would be occupied, the name of France would be changed to an acronym which I cannot at

present recall. The French would be reeducated, as would be the Italians, and so on. Now, you may say that through people like Rupert Murdoch and Robert Maxwell, this has actually taken place, and the populations of Western Europe have, to some extent, been sucked out from under the feet of their political leadership by Anglo-Saxon control of the mass media. But the last page has not been written, and France still exists.

Was de Gaulle a French imperialist, as English historians, the latest being Antony Verrier, never cease to claim? Lefranc only skims the surface of de Gaulle's relations to the Third World, his generosity toward downcast Spain, the nobility and love he showed toward Germany after the war. In his zeal to avoid making personal attacks on powerful figures in French colonial circles, some of whom may perhaps finance today's "Gaullist" party, Lefranc opens his flank to those who would cry: "Yes, a dirty imperialist." Lefranc never once refers to the Synarchy, nor to the big names in banking untouched from Vichy down to our day, though he does hint at General Weygand's Hapsburg allegiances. Why not be clear? De Gaulle never sold a molecule of France for some specious advantage, but neither did he see his job on this earth as the defender of French territorial claims, and Lefranc himself says as much, in his chapter on the Algerian War. There he proves, contrary to received opinion, that de Gaulle had decided from the outset that such a war could never be won and that France had to let go. Again, Lefranc lets us down on the Algerian War: He attacks de Gaulle's former cabinet member Jacques Soustelle, for cowardice because of his support of the terrorist Secret Army Organization; but he fails to explain how Soustelle got his money and international backing. Nor is there anything enlightening here on the massive Anglo-American interference in both the Algerian War and the riots of 1968 which led to de Gaulle's overthrow. Our memorialist refers only in the vaguest of terms to the real imperial French cliques, fattened on Indochina and who now agitate for the Syrian alliance—though then, as now, their actions were nothing if not treason. Lefranc's silences on such things in fact speak loudly about the pitiful state of "Gaullism" today.

Before Mr. LaRouche was thrown into jail, he went often to France. In the early 1970s, the old Gaullist elite was not merely alive, but still pretty frisky. I have myself heard these men say to him: "You are the American de Gaulle." And once someone said: "You are like de Gaulle, only better, because you are more universal." I remember the Resistance fighter, then a Deputy, who dropped his cigar and knocked over a bottle of whisky when he said that. If all the old Resistance fighters who know Mr. LaRouche had kept their word, and had spoken out against his jailing, perhaps he might be free now.

Like LaRouche, de Gaulle was not a politician, but above all, a scientist. He trained for the military career at St. Cyr in the days when history, geometry, and engineering formed

the core of the curriculum, not computer war games and covert operations manuals. His mind was completely free. The beauty of soul, the moral power in the "Appel du 18 juin" can only be compared to the greatest poetry. The essence of Christianity, its incredible power, is summed up in the "Appel," when he writes: "Toutes les fautes, tous les retards, toutes les souffrances, n'empêchent pas qu'il y a, dans l'univers, tous les moyens pour écraser un jour nos ennemis. . . . Le destin du monde est là." ("All our sins, all our hesitation, all our suffering, do not change the fact that there exist, in the universe, the means to one day crush our enemies. . . . There lies the fate of the world.")

De Gaulle also had a delightful sense of humor. I cannot resist repeating one of Lefranc's funniest true stories. At a state dinner, a puffed-up fellow is telling the assembled company how much he knows about poetry. De Gaulle recites a little poem, and says, Guess who wrote it! The fellow hems and haws, "Ah yes, a charming writer from the turn of the century, his name escapes me." "How right you are!" says de Gaulle. "I was born in 1890."

Books Received

Politics by Other Means: The Declining Importance of Elections in America, by Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, Basic Books, New York, 1990, 226 pages, hardbound, \$19.95.

Multiple Exposures, Chronicles of the Radiation Age, by Catherine Caufield, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, 304 pages, paperbound, \$13.95.

Painted Black, by Carl Raschke, Harper and Row, New York, 1990, 276 pages, hardbound, \$22.95.

The New Money Makers, by John Train, Harper and Row, New York, 1990, 385 pages, hardbound, \$22.50.

The Best of Russell Baker, There's a Country in My Cellar, by Russell Baker, William Morrow, New York, 1990, 432 pages, \$20.95.

Patenting the Sun, Polio and the Salk Vaccine, by Jane S. Smith, William Morrow, New York, 1990, 413 pages, hardbound, \$22.95.

Every Spy a Prince, The Complete History of Israel's Intelligence Community, by Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1990, 466 pages, \$24.95.