

COMMENT
A View from Paris

DE GAULLE AND THE COMMON MARKET CRISIS

The difference between the two sides in the present Common Market crisis really relates to the best means of unifying Europe. Roughly speaking Italy and the Netherlands belong to the "federalist" school of thought, which would like to see evolution towards real political integration; France (or perhaps one should say General de Gaulle) takes the "confederalist" line, according to which an inter-governmental organization would be formed, in which the nations would meet and act as partners (see No. 318 page 3). Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg could be regarded as belonging to the first school, if their leaders did not prefer a compromise solution; they probably feel that it is not sensible to fall out over a difference of opinion about the choice of means, especially as history shows that a confederal constitution may be the preliminary to a federal one at a later stage. But if the historians of the future may see in all these questions the apparent reasons for the present dispute, they may well discern another less obvious cause: General de Gaulle's apprehension of the heightened influence which the United States might in his opinion acquire if Europe were unified on federalist principles - that is, if it became more integrated than the confederal Europe formed by sovereign states which he prefers himself. It is this distrust of the United States which puts the passion into General de Gaulle's real and deep attachment to a confederal solution - a passion which has been apparent in his most recent strictures on the "supranationals" and the supporters of political integration; this attachment weighs heavily in the scales in the present crisis.

In order to understand the motives behind the General's various attitudes, there is no better method than to read over his speeches and press conferences, from which his chain of thought can be pieced together. Naturally the remarks made for political expediency should be omitted, but his press conferences in particular are like professional seminars, not the least value of which is that they clarify and crystallize his own thoughts for him. To read them again is to be reminded that the General is just as enthusiastic for the ideal of a united Europe as the keenest "federalists" amongst his opponents, even if he does not agree with them on the method of attaining it, or on the type of Europe it will be.

During the war he had already spoken several times of European unity as the supreme goal. In a press conference in Algeria on April 21, 1944, he said: "We shall see Europe emerge again; now it is oppressed and cannot make itself heard, but the time will come when it will re-appear. Both in this new Europe and within the world peace organization of which we were speaking previously, it seems to us desirable, especially from the economic point of view, that some kind of grouping should be arranged in Western Europe, with the Channel, the Mediterranean and the Rhine for its main communications. I think that this would be the beginning of a European organization

within the world organization, which would have advantages for everybody and particularly for the governments concerned. I believe that we have reached a time for integration". These phrases may be compressed and incomplete, but they are certainly not those of a narrow-minded nationalist, as the General sometimes appears to the "supranationalists".

On July 9, 1947 he said: "Europe (should be) big enough and prosperous enough not merely to survive but to be attractive. This implies that it should be closed to no nation which freely subscribes to the ideals of the organization on which it is founded, and that Europe should constantly invite those on the Continent to join it which, whether by compulsion or by inclination, keep away from it. It even means that the nations which are defeated will find a place in it when they have met the obligations, made the reparations and given the guarantees which should be required of them".

On September 25, 1949 he again spoke of the unification of Europe and threw out the idea of a "great referendum of all free Europeans which should set the movement in train". While in his earlier speeches he thought that Britain should join in this unification, he now spoke of her with disillusion, finding her too subject to American influence. ("England is drifting away, attracted by the trans-Atlantic magnet"). This was also the first time that he contemplated accepting Germany "in spite of everything"; previously he had only been willing to do so provided that the Ruhr was placed under international control.

In his press conference on November 14, 1949 de Gaulle outlined in some detail the European referendum, which he advocated. He wanted to put three questions to the people:

- (1) Do you want Europe to be united, in particular in its economy, its culture and its defence?
- (2) Do you want a confederal organization of the nations of Europe to be formed so as to effect this unity?
- (3) Do you want to appoint an Assembly to devise the institutions of a united Europe?

Knowing how energetically he opposed those who recommended direct elections to the European Parliament later on, question 3 above, which he put forward in 1949, may seem odd; in the same statement he even made it clear that he was thinking of "universal suffrage", and he also used the expression: "Let us organize Europe, starting with Europe's citizens" - a phrase which the most federalist would support. However, the use of the expression "confederal organization" in question 2 shows that he was already far removed from federalist ideas and that he was not really thinking of handing over governmental powers to an assembly elected by the nationals under universal suffrage; at that time he had not yet been struck by the contradiction between that method of election

and a confederal association of governments. Even in 1953 he repeated that he was in favour of the European Assembly being elected by universal suffrage, but later on, as we shall see, he suddenly altered his ideas on the method of appointing its members.

On December 21, 1951 he spoke of the kind of confederation which he thought the European Community should be: "Yes, a confederation of countries forming a joint confederal power, to which each of them should delegate part of its sovereignty. This should apply particularly to economic, defence and cultural subjects". It was a striking statement, for although it still emphasized the part which governments should play, it did foresee partial delegation of their sovereignty in favour of a joint federal power. Such delegation may seem to give exactly the kind of "supranational" powers which he is now strenuously opposing for the new single Commission, which will result from the merger of the Executives (see OME No. 300 P. 5).

The most likely explanation is that the General's statements do from time to time reflect basically liberal ideals (this would also apply to his first ideas on electing members to the European Assembly), but later on he revises them in the light of fears based on his "political realism". When he meets ideas like those he used to favour himself he calls them "chimera", "dreams", "fictions" or sometimes even worse. The sarcasms which he heaps on any supranational or federal plan may in reality be aimed not only against his opponents but also against his own occasional propensity towards nations which, on reflection, he comes to regard as impractical - perhaps this accounts for some of his more emotional expressions.

The press conference of December 21, 1951 was, however, also an occasion on which the federalists' recent progress towards European unification was criticized. The Schuman plan appeared in May 1950 and the treaty which established the European Coal and Steel Community was signed on March 19, 1951. There was a good deal of talk about a European army - or European Defence Community (EDC). For men like Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Adenauer or de Gasperi these schemes were all part of the "functional" approach to the political integration of Europe. This was not General de Gaulle's approach - his logic preferred that a political superstructure should be created from the start and that its spirit should be confederal; as a French soldier with political ambitions he certainly would not want to see the French army disappear, because one day he might wish to make use of it as part of some large arrangement. At the time therefore he called ECSC and the plan for a European army "misleading": he thought that they were only illusory moves towards European unification, but at the same time he recognized that "it is a European interest that coal and steel should be managed jointly". He even attached this solution to his old idea that the Ruhr should be integrated in a European confederation. As he had previously called ECSC "a coal and steel hotch-potch" (May 19, 1950), this was indeed considerable progress. This is an example of his changing his mind in the opposite direction from his changes about universal suffrage and partial delegation of sovereignty. This time he adopted a more flexible attitude

towards ECSC, as a "functional" move towards a final European organization, on the lines favoured by his federalist opponents: in the case of the EDC, however, he remained as negative as ever.

The same position arose again at the end of 1958, when he had been returned to power, and the question came up whether or not he would accept the first of the Common Market's cuts in customs duties, which had been arranged for January 1, 1959, or whether he would invoke the safeguard clauses, as the Rome Treaty entitled him to do. At the time most observers thought that he would do so, for he was believed to be opposed to the basic principles on which the European Community had been founded. This did not happen, however; thus tacitly, the French Government gave a go-ahead to the work of economic unification under the Rome Treaty. Simultaneously, in his television speech of December 28, 1958, de Gaulle for the first time spoke sympathetically of the Common Market. Later on he frequently referred to it and emphasized its benefits.

The General's more flexible attitude and his acceptance of methods which he had previously opposed were again the result of his political realism; this time he fell in with what had been done and saw its constructive value. In the case of the method of electing members to the European Assembly and in that of delegating government sovereignty to a higher European power, his thinking has, however, taken him in the other direction and his "realism" has made him afraid that his own dreams have led him on too far, so he has drawn back quickly while there was still time. His federalist opponents may say that when de Gaulle accepts a "fait accompli" and recognizes its good side, his political realism turns out to be a virtue; on the other hand, when he denies his earlier dreams because he is afraid of the position which may arise if they come true, his realism becomes a vice. Whatever view is taken of these changes of attitude it is important to know how the General's thinking has gone, so as to understand his position better in the present crisis and in the negotiations which will be taking place within the Community.

The press conference of December 21, 1951 contained more than one point of interest: it was apparently here that General de Gaulle first showed his marked dislike for too direct action by the USA. During the war, of course, he had had a number of riffs with President Roosevelt, but a discreet veil seemed to have been drawn across them. On July 9, 1947, when de Gaulle addressed the Anglo-American Press Association in Paris, he freely admitted that the USA might actively support European unification. Speaking of the Marshall Plan, he said "The government of the USA does not merely show its determination to give Europe direct help in its reconstruction and its economic development, but it also invites Europe to form itself into a single whole and to devise a joint plan for all those governments which wish to unite for the sake of recovery. This is a far-seeing idea and it is to be hoped that it will be fruitful, because it commits Europe to solidarity".

In his press conference of March 29, 1949 he again spoke of unifying Europe

and referred to American aid as being of the greatest assistance; by December 21, 1951 however this support suddenly appeared to him as unwelcome pressure, perhaps because American influence was being exerted in favour of methods of unification which he did not like - in this case the European army. In any event the General's appreciative tone had certainly changed: "There are perhaps some irritating expressions of American activity; sometimes they would have you think that the essential element for building a united Europe is pressure from the US, but it is really obvious that Europe will either unite herself or she will not be united at all". And later: "...everything is going along as if there were permanent American pressure on these subjects; the attention of reasonable men cannot be drawn too emphatically to the result of this, which might be, not only that Europe failed to unite, but that causes of friction might be introduced into the Atlantic Alliance, which is now more necessary than ever before." Then continuing in an ironical vein, intended to soften the blow, he said: "...I believe that America is not part of Europe...I have looked at the map. In view of American strength and aid, however, it is only natural that she should be concerned for the success of European unity."

Thus, there was already some anxiety in the General's mind at this time, even if it had not yet become a great suspicion. For several years he did not refer to the subject again, but early in the 60s, after the failure of his plan for tri-partite Anglo-Franco-American higher direction) he took it up afresh and clearly showed his mounting mistrust of American aims; to his mind, the Americans were annoyingly keen on the whole supranational aspect of European unification. It is in this sense that the General's way of thinking along these lines bears closely on the underlying causes of the present crisis.