DeGaulle: Defender Of European Identity

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"As a Frenchman, what do you think of deGaulle and his policy?" one of my students asked me recently. I am glad that the Thresher offers me a chance to reach a larger audience and elaborate on my answer to him.

I was surprised by the uproar in the American press caused by the deGaulle veto of Great Britain's entry into the Common Market. Since then the concentrated attack on the French president has somewhat subsided, but I feel nevertheless that his views have altogether been distorted.

BRITAIN'S DECISION to join the Common Market is a relatively recent one: it started sixteen months ago. On two previous occasions the British government showed its skepticism towards the Common Market: first when the Coal and Steel Community was created in 1950, and later when the Common Market itself came into being with the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

Yet on both occasions Britain was invited to join. Her sudden change of attitude was caused by the fact that her attempt at establishing a rival group of nations (the Seven) failed while the Common Market flourished. Britain could have joined in spite of this, but her unwillingness to accept all the clauses of the Rome Treaty was interpreted by de Gaulle as the proof that she was still not ready to enter the Common Market as an absolutely equal partner. Coupled with this is the fact that England is enjoying a certain type of relationship with this country while others are not (especially in the field of nuclear secrets and armaments.)

DE GAULLE shut the door, undiplomatically perhaps, but effectively, on Britain's face in order to let the world know that the six countries of the Common Market would not let enter a so-called partner that would have drawn Europe outside of her own sphere and given her an identity which is not her own. De Gaulle thinks that the time has not come for the free world to unite under a single leadership (which would naturally be that of the U. S.), but rather for Europe to unite and form a powerful bloc where France would play the leading role. Europe has a strong common heritage which, he reasons, should not be left for its defense in the hands of a non-European power, however well disposed and committed this power is. Hence his rapochelement with Germany and his determination to build up France's own nuclear arsenal. On reading de Gaulle's "War Memoirs" one realizes his constant desire not to see France relying again on allies for her defense. In 1940 Britain was not prepared and the US had retreated to her

(Continued on Page 4)
DeGaulle—

(Continued from Page 2) neutraly, leaving France, alone and insufficiently prepared, to bear the brunt of the German onslaught. This is to a great extent comparable with the US determination after Pearl Harbor not to be caught off guard again.

THE CRIES of Napoleonism, highhandedness, etc. . . , which have been uttered in the American press (and to a lesser degree in the European press) in connection with the de Gaulle policy seem therefore ridiculous. France is not the most populous European country as she was at the time of Louis XIV and Napoleon. She has nevertheless recuperated from her temporary defeat of 1940 and her economic and financial position is now better than ever, while her demographic situation is continuously improving. Politically she has a government more stable than she has had in the last hundred years. De Gaulle, who never despaired of his country in her darkest days told his British and American allies during World War II that indeed if they thought France was forever eliminated as a great power, their policy of ignoring her was justified, but if she were to rise again, then they would be greatly wrong not to heed his words. France is now in a position to make her voice heard and her weight felt once more in world politics. De Gaulle wants her to be the master of her own destiny. As a continental power she played in the past a prominent role in Europe, and it is time for her to do so again.

IN A FEW YEARS there will be free circulation of capital and labor among the Common Market countries and France will likely attract through a peaceful process the overflowing populations of Germany and Italy whom she can easily feed and who will find there a better climate or more favorable living conditions. France may very well become Europe's "California" in the next few decades.

It would be a mistake to think, as some American newspapers and politicians believe, that the policy of de Gaulle (and of Adenauer) will not outlast these men and that once they are retired from office or dead, everything they have done will crumble. I believe they have given enough impetus, even at this stage, for their successors, whatever they may be, to continue a basically similar policy. Men, regimes and ideologies change, de Gaulle thinks, but countries remain, with their own interests fundamentally the same.

THE RESURGENCE, if not Renaissance of Europe, and the de Gaulle challenge should not be a cause for alarm in this country, on the contrary. The Marshall Plan saved Europe from anarchy and from the eventual triumph of Communism; the Europeans know it and acknowledge it. They know that the American nuclear deterrent is still essentially for their defense. But they become increasingly aware of the possibility of resisting Russian threats and blackmail through their own defense. The US protection will be less and less necessary as time goes on. Then, de Gaulle figures, Europe (with England this time) and America will be allied as perfectly equal partners and together will accomplish the task of the century to come, namely that of bringing the rest of the world prosperity and liberty compatible with its traditions and heritage.

To be sure, there are risks in this policy, but de Gaulle thinks that great designs cannot be achieved in mediocrity and without appealing to man's ever present desire to transcend his condition. Rien, he says, ne prodede que de l'esprit.