France and European integration: from the Schuman plan to economic and monetary union.

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Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 255pp., $39.95 h.b., ISBN 0-8014-4086-6

David J. Howarth, *The French Road to European Monetary Union* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2001), 256pp., £42.50 h.b., ISBN 0-333-92096-1

David J. Howarth, *Economic Management and French Business from de Gaulle to Chirac* (New York and London: Palgrave, 2001), 256pp., £42.50 h.b., ISBN 0-333-76148-0

Few would question the importance of the role played by France in the integration of Western Europe but there is little agreement over French motives, nor over whether those motives were the same for each decision taken to surrender sovereignty over the entire postwar period. It is sometimes forgotten, particularly in Britain, that the question of European integration has been a deeply divisive one in France, cutting across political parties, the Administration and sectoral interests. The Treaty of Maastricht was accepted by the most slender of majorities – 51 per cent of those who voted in the 1992 referendum. The disagreement in explaining French policy towards European integration stems partly from the difficulties which historians face in gaining access to the official record, particularly under the Fifth Republic, and partly from differences in interpretation of that record. But the disagreement is also due to debates conducted mainly within the

political science and international relations literature about the causes of European integration in general.

Taking the postwar period as a whole several questions have so far dominated discussions about France. Firstly, why, despite the success of their system of national economic planning, did the French agree to adopt the liberal framework of the European Economic Community? Secondly, why did they not agree to integrate defence? Thirdly, why was it that de Gaulle, the arch-opponent of supranationalism, was responsible for the most supranational of policies, the Common Agricultural Policy? And finally, why did the French agree to Economic and Monetary Union with its restrictive Growth and Stability Pact, rather than retain the flexibility of the European Monetary System? The debate in the literature, simplified here for heuristic purposes, is between those who argue that France's interest in European integration has been driven by the geopolitical imperative of reconciliation and co-existence with Germany[1] and those who claim that its primary purpose was to advance France's domestic policy choices, however they were defined.[2] Integration once under way was then extended either through a process of institutional spill-over[3] or through inter-governmental bargaining in which economic and

[1] Pierre Gerbet, *La France et l'intégration européenne: essai d'historiographie* (Berne and New York: Peter Lang, 1995); Gérard Bossuat, *La France, l'aide américaine et la construction européenne 1944-1954* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1992) and *L'Europe des Français* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996); William Hitchcock, *France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Leadership in Europe 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Georges-Henri Souton, *L'Alliance incertaine: les rapports politico-stratégiques franco-allemands 1954-1996* (Paris: Fayard, 1996); F. Roy Willis, *France, Germany and the New Europe 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).
[2] Sylvie Lefèvre, *Les relations économiques franco-allemandes de 1945 à 1955. De l'occupation à la coopération* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998); Frances M. B. Lynch, *France and the International Economy, from Vichy to the Treaty of Rome* (London: Routledge, 1997); Alan S. Milward, *The Reconstruction of Western Europe* (London: Routledge, 1984); and *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge, 1994 & 2000).
[3] Hanns Jürgen Küsters, *Fondements de la Communauté Economique Européenne* (Brussels and Luxembourg: EurOP and Labor, 1990).

commercial interests had priority.[4]

The three books discussed here, all written by non-historians, contribute either directly or indirectly to this debate. Indeed Craig Parsons sets out to extend the parameters of the debate by reviving an early interpretation of French policy towards European integration – namely the role of the pro-community ideas held by key policy-makers in France. Parsons' central claim is that not only do ideas matter in politics but that each of the key decisions taken by French governments to surrender a degree of sovereignty, namely, the decisions to form the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), was taken primarily because of the pro-community ideas held by some of the policy-making elite at critical junctures. How this elite interpreted French interests was, he claims, quite removed from any definition of their objective position. To prove his thesis Parsons, unusually for a political scientist, dips into the French archives (almost entirely those in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), draws upon a formidable range of secondary literature and conducts extensive interviews with politicians and high-ranking civil servants. What emerges is a picture of French leaders with considerable freedom to choose and implement their European strategies due to the difficulty which political parties had in elaborating coherent positions, and to the lack of information given and hence of interest shown by voters in European issues at major elections. On each occasion when the French leaders chose to surrender sovereignty (and on the occasion of the European Defence Community when they chose not to), Parsons, displaying a mastery of the literature, examines the alternatives open to

[4] Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

them in considerable detail. These alternatives he classifies as a traditional defence of the institutional status quo, or broad intergovernmental cooperation.

Starting with Schuman's proposal in 1950 to create a European Coal and Steel Community, Parsons shows that there was some support for all three alternative arrangements and that Schuman 'could equally well have constructed support for confederal or traditional stances' but 'took a leap in the dark towards his interpretation of French interests' (p.66). Yet, as Parsons himself acknowledges, neither the traditional nor the confederal policies which had been tried in the period 1945-49 had succeeded in delivering what the French most needed, as defined in the national plan. This was guaranteed access to the coal and coke resources of the Ruhr on which the expansion of the French steel industry depended and on which, by extension, the future competitiveness of the French economy was seen to rest.[5] Neither Robert Schuman nor Jean Monnet, the head of the *Commissariat au Plan*, author of the Schuman Plan and acknowledged 'Father of Europe' proposed a pro-community policy until after all other options had been exhausted.

Why did France sign the Treaty of Rome setting up the EEC? For Parsons it was firstly because the pro-community conservative Antoine Pinay, French foreign minister at the time of the Messina negotiations in June 1955, ignored his government's instructions to reject a common market, and secondly because his model of a desirable Europe was shared by the subsequent Socialist Prime Minister Guy Mollet, as well as by key advisers such as Maurice Faure and Robert Marjolin.

[5] Matthias Kipping, *La France et les origins de l'Union européenne 1944-1952: intégration économique et compétitivité internationale* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 2002).

Parsons ignores, because it does not fit his argument, the fact that the pro-community Mollet proposed in mid-1956 the formation of an Imperial customs union composed of the French Union and the British Empire, in order to keep France out of the common market with Germany.[6] When that option was closed by the British Cabinet France faced the choice of economic autarchy, with or without the rest of the French Union, participation in a free trade area under British terms, or continuing to negotiate an acceptable deal within an Economic Community of the Six. Parsons' argument that it was pro-community ideas rather than the promotion of French economic interests which explained the French government's choice of the EEC is not convincing. Even the skeptical de Gaulle had to accept that the terms negotiated in the Treaty of Rome served France's economic interest.[7]

Parsons' belief in the supremacy of pro-community ideas as the driving force in French decision-making towards Europe creates difficulties for him in explaining the French rejection of the EDC. Castigating those historians who ignore the EDC[8] or misinterpret it[9] for committing 'one of the most important errors underlying the common dismissal of ideas in EU history' (p.68), Parsons argues that the EDC 'came very close to succeeding'. Indeed, had it succeeded, 'Europe would have taken a giant leap towards political unity, perhaps establishing the common foreign and security policy that still eludes the EU today' (p.89). It could be argued that what the EDC episode does confirm is that when a pro-community policy emerged in France in response to an external

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[6] Lynch, *op. cit.*, pp.178-179.
[7] Maurice Vaisse, *La Grandeur. Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958-1969* (Paris: Fayard, 1998) p.167.
[8] Lynch *op. cit.*, Milward *op. cit.*
[9] Hitchcock *op. cit*., Paul Pitman, "France's European Choices", Ph.D. dissertation, Colombia University, 1998.

pressure (American insistence on German rearmament) rather than to a domestic policy choice, it did not succeed.

If the failed attempt to integrate defence raises difficult issues, even more problematical for Parsons' thesis is the success of the CAP thanks to a leader who held decidedly anti-community ideas. Parsons explains de Gaulle's support for the CAP as serving de Gaulle's own very different ideas about Europe. It was no more than a means to an end. When his European policy failed, 'this institutionally structured strategy had become so embedded in international demands and vested domestic interests that even de Gaulle could do little to change it' (p.142). Parsons chooses not even to discuss the counter-argument that de Gaulle's support for the CAP may have been an end in itself.[10]

In analyzing the two most recent extensions of integration, the Single European Act and Economic and Monetary Union, Parsons enters largely undocumented territory.[11] Believing that 'the broad pattern of French mobilization on European issues in the 1970s followed the lines that gelled in the 1950s' (p.156), he sets out to test his ideational theory against the competing theories based on defence of France's domestic policy choices or geopolitical concerns. As against claims that the Single European Act was a response to earlier failures of policy to deal with growing economic interdependence, he claims that the standard response to greater interdependence would have been greater liberalization. The reason why the French chose institution-building rather than greater liberalization was that they had a 'pro-community leader' (Mitterrand) who stood out from his coalitional support (p.179). Mitterrand is also credited with securing support for

[10] Andrew Moravcsik, "Between Grain and Grandeur: the political economy of French EC policy, 1958-1970", *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 2/2 and 2/3, Spring and Fall 2000.
[11] One recent exception is: Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, *Le role des ministères des Finances et de l'Economie dans la construction européenne 1957-1978* (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 2002).

EMU in France. 'French pursuit of full EMU was decided personally by Mitterrand, over objections from some of his closest allies and advisors' (p.203). This view is shared by David Howarth in *The French Road to European Monetary Union*. In a detailed analysis of the causes of the French decision to support EMU, based on interviews with French politicians and officials as well as a wide range of secondary literature, Howarth agrees that 'Mitterrand was central to the successful conclusion of a deal at Maastricht' (p.142). Unlike Parsons, Howarth explains Mitterrand's motives primarily in geopolitical terms. The French President hoped through monetary union to increase France's power in relation to both Germany and the United States. In the words of Dyson and Featherstone, 'EMU was about rebalancing international and European monetary power in France's favour'.[12] On the question of whether in fact EMU would help France to achieve such an objective, neither economic theory nor the advice of the French financial administrative elite was unambiguous. As Parsons shows, a body of opinion, which included the French Finance Minister who negotiated EMU, preferred central bank coordination or a 'parallel' European currency (as promoted by Britain) to the delegation of monetary control to the European Central Bank. Many French elites saw the EMS and SEA themselves as causes of their monetary predicament. Indeed, divisions of opinion within the financial administrative elite are used by Howarth as evidence that Mitterrand's decision to support EMU was taken to enhance French power rather than in response to economic realities or economic theory, and by Parsons to support his theory that Mitterrand's actions can be explained by his pro-Community ideas. But apart from differing in their interpretation of his motives, both Howarth and Parsons agree on the key role played by Mitterrand in the

[12] Kenneth Dyson and Kevin Featherstone, *The Road to Maastricht: negotiating economic and monetary union* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.62.

EMU project. (Interestingly, Mitterrand is not even mentioned in Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa's insider account of the road to monetary union in Europe.[13]) They also share a common view of the divisions within French political parties and the administrative elite over French strategy towards Europe.

These divisions play little part in Mairi MacLean, *Economic Management and French Business from de Gaulle to Chirac*. Concerned to explain how France moved away from economic protectionism to espouse liberalism and the values of corporate capitalism, MacLean emphasizes the common views and influence of the administrative elite. She describes the graduates of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA) and of other *Grandes Ecoles* as coming from a 'common mould' and educated in a 'common world view' (p.71), and attributes French economic successes to the agreed ideological lines emanating from this institutional framework. Awkward questions such as whether interdependence or integration was the more appropriate framework for enabling French business to compete internationally, are carefully avoided. Implicitly, European integration is seen as serving the interests of French business.

In fact the ideological struggle which MacLean analyzes concerns only two of the alternative institutional frameworks so cogently presented by Parsons. In doing so she fits into a long tradition of writing about France which focuses exlusively on the debate between the state and the market, between *dirigisme* and liberalism, between autarchy and free trade. How to fit European integration into that debate is a critical issue for those writing about postwar France.

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[13] Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, *The Road to Monetary Union in Europe. The Emperor, the King and the Genies* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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