

POLITICAL PARTIES IN FRANCE. I¹

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A FRENCHMAN who undertakes to describe to a foreign reader the political parties of his own country finds it necessary first of all to explain certain peculiarities of our general political life which have made our party system very different from that of other nations with parliamentary institutions. In English-speaking countries like Great Britain and the United States, party leaders enforce discipline among their followers both in Parliament or Congress and outside of it, compel members to vote as the caucus or the ministry dictates, and see to it that citizens cast their ballots for the regular ticket. Consequently political power in those countries is generally centred in two great parties, one of which is prepared to take over the Government when the other is defeated.

In France the citizen votes for a candidate with the idea that a second ballot will be taken if no candidate receives an absolute majority. This weakens political discipline and makes an elaborate campaign organization unnecessary. The voter, after casting his ballot at the first election for the nominee of his own party, often has to cast it at the second polling for the candidate of another party — the one to which he is least opposed.

None of our old parties ever had a central committee or held national conventions. No such thing as recognized party leaders, party platforms, or

a party discipline existed. There was no party press and no party campaign fund. In brief, both electors and members of the Chamber were largely unorganized. During campaigns each candidate argued for the policies he personally advocated, paid his expenses out of his own pocket or from funds raised by a temporary committee, and pleaded his cause through a newspaper that he either owned or subsidized. Not unusually a candidate was recommended to the voters by some local meeting, but his party tag as a Liberal, a Democrat, a Republican, a Radical, or a Socialist did not obligate him to adopt a definite policy. He joined the group in the Chamber that he liked best, or refused to ally himself with any of them. He did not attend caucuses unless he wanted to, and he voted against the majority of his group — if he belonged to one — whenever he thought best.

So both Houses of the French Parliament consist of constantly shifting bodies, which divide, amalgamate, and change their names — oftentimes during a single session. Since no single group ever commands a majority in the Chamber, but has to combine with other groups to form the ministry, general elections never determine the personnel of the Cabinet. After the votes are counted, no one can say what party will provide the Premier, as in England.

To be sure, the Socialists, who have been a factor in politics only since

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1904, have a permanent organization and try to enforce strict discipline on their voters and their representatives in Parliament. This party has a central committee and executive officers, and holds national conventions. It drafts a platform which everyone must support, maintains a party press, and has disciplinary machinery resembling that of the Catholic Church to enforce its dogmas and to excommunicate heretics. When the Communists set up a separate party organization in 1920, at the instigation of the Third Moscow International, they adopted the same system. So these two parties depart from French political usage, which requires the deputy to be responsible only to his electors; and this innovation has had a revolutionary effect upon French public life.

If we except the Socialists and Communists, however, we have no parties in the English or American sense. Consequently, when we speak of French parties, we do not mean by that word what people mean in England, the United States, or Germany. Our Parliament consists of groups. The voters cast their ballots for men of certain 'tendencies,' not of certain platforms, and the candidates elected ally themselves in Parliament with whatever group or coterie will best help them to put their personal policies into effect.

Each group has a sort of organization: a chairman, a meeting place, an order of business, and sometimes a programme. It bears a name and has a registered list of members, for since 1910 committee appointments have been allotted on the basis of the strength of each group. Since 1914, moreover, each of them has had its allotted place in the Chamber — the Communists on the extreme Left, the Conservatives on the extreme Right, and the other parties in between. Nevertheless these groups are only

superficial and transitory. The deputies form them of their own volition for a specific purpose and dissolve them or modify them to suit the needs of the moment.

Old groups like the Monarchists, Legitimists, Orleanists, and Imperialists have vanished. New groups like the Radical Socialists, the Socialists, the United Socialists, the Republican Socialists, and the Communists have sprung up. In the Senate several groups survive whose names stand simply for historical memories — like the Republican Left of Grévy's time, which now sits on the Right, and the Republican Union of Gambetta. In the Chamber of 1914 there were three Left groups: the Radical Left, the Left Federation, and the Republican Left, all of which sat on the Right side of the Chamber. The same situation exists in the Chamber of 1924, where four groups — the Radical Left, the Republican-Democratic Left, the Independent Left, and the Left Republicans — sit on either the Right Centre or the Right of the Chamber. Other groups have assumed names which mean literally the opposite of what they stand for. The Liberal-Action group of 1902 and the Democratic group of 1924 are Catholic bodies; and since the latter date the extreme Right has called itself the Democratic-Republican Union.

'Tendencies,' however, are profound and permanent factors in French political life. They express the enduring opinions of large bodies of citizens. The voter does not know much about the different groups, but he does know the tendencies of the candidates, and he votes for these. In studying the political geography of France, therefore, we must study the localization of tendencies rather than of groups. To understand the origin of these tendencies, we must go back into history — in fact to the great fundamental divi-

sion between the supporters of the Revolution of 1789 and the defenders of the old régime. From the same period dates an enduring geographical division in French politics between the Northwest, the land of the Vendée, which was Loyalist and intensely Clerical, and the Liberal East, where a majority of the priesthood supported the new Constitution.

Subject to various modifications, these two broad schools of political opinion still exist in France. When the Republicans acquired a definite ascendancy in 1879 and the Monarchists were driven into the Opposition, many of the latter dropped their Royalist tag. But the Republicans themselves, now that they had become overwhelmingly the stronger party, subdivided into a Conservative and a Radical Wing, and from that time onward divisions multiplied.

In 1898 several of the Conservative factions got together as a Progressist group, which associated itself with the old Conservatives, the Catholics, and the Nationalists, on the Right; while the Radicals, Socialist Radicals, and Socialists formed a more or less united body on the Left. It was at this time that the clerical question became the great issue in French politics. This situation did not last long, however, for with the appearance of an organized Socialist Party the whole political situation changed. In 1910 the groups of the Left, weakened by the defection of the Socialists, who joined the Right in its campaign in favor of proportional representation, were defeated; but they won again in 1913, because the Socialists had swung back again to their old attitude in opposition to the militarist policy of Poincaré.

Then came the first post-war election of 1919, which resulted in an overturn in the Chamber, due not to any change in the sentiment of the voters

but to the operation of the new electoral law, which enabled the National Bloc, whose constituent groups played into each other's hands at the polls, to elect a majority of its candidates without having a majority of the nation behind it. This produced an abnormal situation — a Chamber controlled by the Conservatives although the electorate was unmistakably Radical. That situation was rectified, however, at the next election, in the spring of 1924.

Conservative tendencies are ordinarily strongest in France, as elsewhere, among the well-to-do and those who are lifted above the rank and file of the nation by birth, property, education, or social position. These classes are represented by the descendants of the old nobility, the clergy, country gentry, and leaders of the industrial, commercial, and financial world with the exception of the Protestants, the Jews, and a few Catholics. Since the parties of the Right have reconciled themselves to Republican institutions, a majority of our lawyers, physicians, artists, writers, and government officials have allied themselves with these groups. They form the general staff and the active element in the former Monarchist, but now Republican, Right. They are not numerous enough, however, to carry an election under universal suffrage except with the help of other classes. They are able to do this in some parts of the country, either through the influence of the clergy, or because the voters are economically dependent on large landowners and employers. Some members of the lower middle class in the towns are also inclined for business reasons to show political favor to these groups.

Naturally the working classes, peasants, and minor officials form the rank and file of the groups of the Left, so far as these classes feel themselves independent of the economic pressure of the

rich, the moral prestige of the clergy, and the influence of 'good society.' If they were left entirely to themselves we should probably find that all over France, with the possible exception of Normandy, the principal passion of the Frenchman is equality. He will instinctively vote for a peasant for burgo-master in preference to a nobleman or a great landlord. The rank and file are led by liberal-minded lawyers, physicians, professors, and journalists, — particularly those of Protestant, Jewish, and Freemason antecedents, — and above all, of late years, by the teachers.

No clear line of demarcation separates the different groups on the Left. It is impossible to distinguish a Republican Socialist from a Radical Socialist or either of these from a Radical. In fact, the United Socialists themselves have been unable, in spite of all the efforts of their leaders, to keep entirely separate from the bourgeois parties. Very frequently an elector is moved by personal connections or by the character of the candidate to cast his ballot successively for a Radical, a Socialist, or even a Communist.

The defense of Republican institutions against Conservative reaction, and of the existing social system against Socialist revolution, is assumed by the

Republican groups, which formerly sat upon the Left, but now occupy the Right, and have a very small majority in the Senate. They could count for a long time upon the undivided support of the bourgeois middle classes, who were in conflict with the Royalist nobility, and of all farmers, shopkeepers, clerks, and petty officials, so far as they were not controlled by the clergy. These classes were not particularly interested in reform of any kind, but they were equally hostile to aristocratic reaction and social revolution. So the Republicans steered a middle course between the two, and for twenty years controlled the Government. Even after they were defeated by the Left bloc in 1913, and again in 1924, they promptly returned to the attack in an attempt to recover power.

Nationalist, militarist, and anti-Semite sympathies exist among the Paris middle classes, who are instinctively Radical, but are temperamentally inclined to be against the Government. These classes are traditionally hostile to foreigners, and they are anti-Semite because they hate high finance. They have been heavily reënforced since the Dreyfus affair, when the remnants of the former Royalist and Catholic parties joined them.

WHEN THE SOKOLS GATHER¹

BY ORIO VERGANI

[THE Sokols, like the German Turners, combine with their conception of physical culture the ideal of moral and political discipline and national vigor. Their athletic exercises are intended to prepare the members for civic duties rather than for competitive sports.]

PRAGUE'S great Sokol stadium crowns a hill beyond the Vltava, from which the city below is invisible. It is beyond the gray mass of the Hradčany, or ancient residence of the Hapsburgs, where President Masaryk now dwells with his great library. The philosopher-president, though seventy-six years old, is reported to devour a couple of volumes daily and then to ride two hours on horseback. I catch merely a glimpse beyond the Palace Park of the spires of the Cathedral, which is cut off from view by a girdle of palace buildings and is said to occupy the site of an ancient Roman temple. Scanning the prospect in that direction, I also make out other interesting points in the panorama, including the bridges across the Vltava, whose waters have been so swollen by the recent heavy rains as to prevent the proposed water carnival.

But I have little time to study the view. The Sokols are as prompt as clockwork, and they are scheduled to be here precisely at 2 P.M. If you are not in your seat — of the one hundred and fifty thousand in the stadium

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— promptly to the minute, they will not wait for you.

One hardly needs to read the enthusiastic descriptions in the press to realize that this stadium is probably larger than any other in the world; that it vastly exceeds those at Stockholm, Philadelphia, and Berlin; and that even the Olympic Stadium at Paris could be tucked away in one of its corners. They tell you, moreover, that it occupies a site originally so rocky and broken that the old Austrian garrison used it for mountaineer manoeuvres; but to-day machines and explosives, and above all the brawny arms of the Sokols themselves, have made it as flat as a billiard table.

Sokol! Sokol! Sokol! The whole pride of the nation bursts forth in a roar of greeting. The words seem to say: 'Behold us, the Western vanguard of the Slavs, united in democracy and brotherhood!'

Big numbers make one dizzy. Hundred thousands and two hundred thousands are bandied about as if they were integers bereft of zeros. Everything is on a grand scale, even the gigantic wooden statues perched above the entrance pillars of the grounds. Just outside are huge wooden sheds as large as airship hangars, where beer, ices, coffee, hot sausages, and cucumber pickles are served to a quarter of a million daily. For those who wish to carry home more enduring mementos of the great event, there are battalions of hawkers selling Sokol shields, ribbons with patriotic mottoes, pictures of