

About This Issue

Some thoughts from the guest editor

by Gerda Bikales

Writings about a foreign country, a non-English speaking one at that, demand an effort from everyone – translators, editors and readers too. We thank our readers in advance for putting up with all those words in italics and parentheses, with unfamiliar names and institutions, with all those explanatory footnotes.

We think that the subject is worth that effort. We are talking about France here, the country that, for its own reasons, stood with us at the dawn of our Revolution, and was fired up by events on our side of the Atlantic to start a Revolution of its own. Together, these two nations pulled off the chains of tyranny that had so long oppressed the peoples of Europe and its American colonies, allowing new societies to flourish in freedom.

Most revolutionary, of course, were the ideas that had preceded action. That ordinary people, guided by reason, had the power and even the duty to rule themselves, that every human being had inherent rights to liberty and dignity simply by virtue of *being*, was new thinking that electrified the world. Many of these theories were generated by the French philosophers we know so well – Montesquieu and Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau – collectively known in their country as *les lumières*, “the lights” that lit the way. The theories were implemented by the American Founding Fathers, who were the first to make them work in the real world.

And so the ties between France and the United States have been deep and indeed special. America was fortunate, for its Revolution was clean and decisive. The French Revolution of 1789 was not. It was followed by

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the bloody Terror and repeated slides into autocratic rule – monarchs, emperors, and the fascist Vichy government. But the relationship endured, as the American World War I and World War II military cemeteries in France attest.

It was never unambiguous. The Founders who spent much time in France reacted very differently to that experience. Thomas Jefferson was a great admirer of

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everything French, while John Adams detested it. Benjamin Franklin had a fine time in France but was mistrustful. The French, for their part, were not much given to gratitude. In the post-World War II years, as French influence waned, they showed themselves increasingly resentful of America’s political and cultural preeminence. As the playwright Eugène Labiche observed in one of his comedies, people don’t much care for those who save them, but tend to be very fond of those they save. He might have been thinking of the France-U.S. relationship.

Other than a common history as pioneering promoters of human freedom, there were other characteristics about France that Americans found *sympathique*. Its population was the most diverse on the European continent – as the country had united dispersed

dukedom and shaped them into one nation, it took in Celts, Germans, Basques, and various Mediterranean peoples. In the nineteenth century, France too became a country of immigration, adding Italians, Spaniards, Arabs, Poles, Russians, Armenians and others to the mix. It demanded a high level of franco-conformity from these newcomers, far more than the mild anglo-conformity we expected from our own immigrants. In both countries, the schools of the era were up to the task of training the next generation of citizens. And in both countries, the past forty years have seen large-scale immigration from the non-Western world and new challenges to their assimilative capacities.

The “sixties” are another revolution that we shared with France. Again, theirs started after ours, in 1968, but it made up for the delay by its intensity. The revolt of the young and privileged against the middle-class standards of their parents combined high-minded concern for the world’s disadvantaged with exalted sexual freedom. As in America, respected institutions – the family, the church, the schools – quickly lost their authority. French universities overturned the merit standard and opened their doors wide, building many new ones in the process. Many veterans of those heady times, the “*soixante-huitards*,” the sixty-eighters,” are now in positions of leadership in the country. Like their American analogs, they preach impassioned political correctness to people who have come to know better.

The post-communist world has not been kind to France. With America the world’s unrivaled superpower, anti-American resentment boiled over, most memorably in its aggressive power plays in the weeks leading up to the Iraq war. The Atlantic alliance that had united Western Europe and North America against the communist threat had lost its relevance and France searched for alternatives. It has pinned its hopes for renewed international influence and prestige on a federated European Union, within which it could rightfully play a starring role. Looking about for a new friend, it thinks it found one in today’s bigger, bolder, reunited Germany. Of course, Germany is a country that can not ever claim to have saved France and so, if Labiche’s views on friendship are sound, it may be a good match for a time.

We have assembled in this issue a number of articles aiming to shed some light on what has become of our old partner, beyond what we casually gather from the

press. We asked Jean-Paul Gourévitch, an expert on African immigration to France, to share his thoughts on Raspail’s prophecy of a Third World invasion of France, thirty years after the publication of *Camp of the Saints*. We probed this further in a more wide-ranging interview, which left us with mixed impressions. Theodore Dalrymple sadly watches the lights go out in the “City of Lights.” This writer takes a stab at explaining the Corsican conundrum that has exposed the French government’s paralysis and double-dealings when faced with a bunch of terrorist racketeers. We have a report on the ultimate politically correct trial – that of the novelist Michel Houellebeck. The demographer Michele Tribalat clues us in on the significance of the Islamic veil controversy, and helps us to get a handle on the number of Muslims living in France, a subject that comes up repeatedly in this issue. Finally, in the book review section, we feature a recent collection of essays on the state of the schools.

Read on!

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Further Collection of Papers by John Cairns, Jr., Ph.D.

ESEP (Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics) makes professional papers and insights available world-wide, free of charge and at one’s fingertips. Currently posted is Book 2 by Dr. Cairns, “Eco-Ethics and Sustainability Ethics.” It contains such chapters as: “Ethical Issues in Ecological Restoration,” “Environmental Refugees,” “Repairing the Country’s Ecological Infrastructure: The Cumulative Impact of Small Decisions,” seventeen in all.

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