



JOURNAL À PLUSIEURS VOIX

DE GAULLE IN HIS CENTURY

Few statesmen have seemed at odds with their time as much as Charles de Gaulle. Still fewer have marked so strongly the century in which they have lived. In a century when the prevailing cultural climate was one of economic determinism, he always behaved accordingly to his principle, that politics had to lead and that the supply train would follow. In a century marked by a society without identity, he always stressed the concept of the patrie. People were amused, or sometimes irritated, by his obstinacy in addressing the Soviets as "Russians", convinced as he was that ideologies pass with time, while nations live forever. But on both points he has now had his revenge with the failure of communism, from the ruins of which national feelings are reappearing with enormous vigour, not only among minor and oppressed nations, but in the Russian nation as well.

For having vetoed the admission of Britain into the European Community, he was denounced as anti-European. Yet twenty years after his death most pro-Europeans look at him as a symbol—the symbol of those who believe that European unification has to be intensified within a nucleus of Western European countries, rather than be watered down in larger groupings, as suggested by Gorbachev on one side and Mrs. Thatcher on the other.

In many respects an old-fashioned personality, he nevertheless understood long before anybody else the problems that will continue to be with us for the rest of this century. His idea that a modern France should have one hundred million inhabitants is in sharp contrast with the parochialism of the present reaction to immigration, and foreshadowed population policies that may have to be debated very soon.

Politically humiliated in 1968, and pushed to resignation one year later by the most conspicuous explosion utopian of beliefs after the Soviet revolution, his aristocratic way appeared completely obsolete with respect to the grocery-store style vulgarity that has prevailed in European political life since the mid 70s. Still, on the centennial of his birth, it appears clearly that Charles de Gaulle's shadow will stay with us for a long time in the coming century, when even the memory of most politicians that were his contemporaries will have disappeared. (G.S.)