

The Rise and Fall of the Entente

By J. T. WALTON NEWBOLD

II. Economic Origins

THE multiplicity of political fractions, which has rendered the interplay of French affairs almost unintelligible to the English observer and which has now been modified very considerably by the formation of the "Bloc National," had a basis in the economy of the Third Republic.

The Home of the Bourgeoisie

France is, and has for a century been, the fountain head of bourgeois democracy.

It has been thus, the nursery and school house of middle-class politics, because it has been the one country in which material conditions have made for the survival of the middle-class as the dominant class.

Capitalism in France grew up in and has continued to draw its substance from an economy of land cultivation and the working up for the market of the produce of the farm, the field and the vineyard.

Thus in its earlier stages (i.e., in the 18th century) French Capitalism was a stronger and richer growth than its English and Scottish contemporaries.

Fortified by these resources, the bourgeoisie of France tried conclusions with the autocracy and its landlord supporters and, in the great Revolution, swept them away and built up a new political system on the razed ruins of the old.

Immediately thereafter, it sought, under the eagles of Buonaparte, to recover the fields of exploitation which it had lost by reason of the ineptitude of the later Bourbons and its own absorption in the revolutionary struggle.

It failed. It failed heroically under the spectacular leadership of Napoleon the Great. It failed less conspicuously but none the less surely under the Restoration and under the rule of Louis Philippe. It failed melodramatically under Napoleon the Little. It failed obscurely in the earlier years of this, the Third Republic.

The reasons for this failure—long drawn out and productive of so much discontent within and disturbance without—were not to be sought in the political crises and upheavals which accompanied it.

Cotton and Corn

The French bourgeoisie failed in the 20th century because, after the Industrial Revolution in Britain (which occurred simultaneously with their political Revolution) the material basis of British production became bedded in just that prime necessity in which France is so conspicuously lacking—Coal.

Not only had and has France very inadequate supplies of coal but those she has lie in scattered fields, remote from her iron mines and distant, also, from good harbours and navigable waters.

Moreover, the great cotton manufactures upon which the Liberal bourgeoisie of Lancashire and the West of Scotland grew rich and prospered so exceedingly, took their rise just at the very time when the Blockade prevented the French obtaining adequate supplies of cheap raw material. Thus, the French cotton manufactures laboured under an enormous initial handicap. Furthermore, there has been no heavy import of foodstuffs in France to foster a big export of finished articles. The textile manufacturers of the North have had to depend on sources of raw material dominated by British capital. Cotton has contributed much, directly and

indirectly, to the establishment of the Entente.

Credits and Colonies

Then, at successive periods, British financial houses have done a great deal to help French governments to stabilise themselves. The Restoration in 1816 drew upon the Barings. The men who imposed their will upon Louis Philippe in 1830 were financed by the Rothschilds or by the Liberal Catholics who had financed Daniel O'Connell and Catholic Emancipation. Other British bourgeois lined their nest in aid of Napoleon III.

When in 1848 not only did the Liberal bourgeoisie of the Rhineland fail to set up a German Republic financed and ruled by Frankfurt capitalists but the process of unification under Prussia made Berlin and Dresden of more importance, many of the Radical bourgeois hived off to Antwerp, London, Liverpool and Paris.

These gentry became very powerful in the Third Republic. They were cosmopolitans. They were an influence making for solidarity between Britain, France and Belgium. They desired the overthrow of the Brandenburg's Kaiser and a bourgeois alliance of republics run by and in the interest of bankers.

In the Third Republic, Gambetta, Rouvier and Painlevé successively pursued the aim of establishing an entente with the Liberal and the Liberal Unionist bourgeoisie of Great Britain.

Such were the deepening currents which made for co-operation with Britain, with Liberalised Britain, as a definite principle of French bourgeois statecraft.

Not, however, until the Monarchist-Clerical-Nationalist Reaction had finally been pulverised into acceptance of the Republic as a *fait accompli* was it possible to set about deliberately to cement an alliance with the State in whose Empire and whose spheres of influence the banking oligarchy of Republicanism and Radicalism had so many milliards of francs invested.

Because of their material interests in the Rand, in Egypt, in Argentina and in the strategically exposed areas of Madagascar and Indo-China, the bankers (whose agent was Rouvier) made an entente with Britain.

Not only so, but in 1898 it became obvious to all the parties of the French bourgeoisie that in opposition to Britain they could not hope to extend their Empire.

But the year that saw Fashoda saw, also, the passing through the Reichstag of the first German Navy Law.

The logic of the situation was plain. The lessons of history were obvious.

Here was the hereditary enemy of the seas challenged by the hereditary enemy of the land. Here was Britain challenged by Germany as she had been of old by Spain and Holland and France. Here were the two great industrial capitalist Powers coming into conflict.

Coal and Iron

These two rivals were each rivals of France. They were each more powerful than her in this stage of economical development by reason of the fact that they had what she lacked. They had coal and iron in abundance and organised industries, reared upon the exploitation of both in conjunction.

France needed to gain control of coal and iron.

As yet she scarcely understood the immeasurable potentialities of the iron-ore fields of Normandy and Anjou but she had just begun to appreciate the riches and to exploit the ore field of Briey.

The latter field was, besides, a part of the great Luxemburg-Lorraine field, exploited and contributing almost the whole native supplies of ore to Germany.

It was, however, on the very frontier.

It was necessary to bring Briey, to bring the whole field, back behind the frontier of France, safe behind the guns of French fortresses.

Britain was in need of iron-ore. Britain was jealous of Germany's competition in the steel trade. Britain was jealous of Germany's increasing coal exports.

France had one important coalfield, but this was only part of a larger field underlying both her own soil and that of Belgium. It was, moreover, a field that continued eastward and emerged again in the Ruhr Valley. *It would be possible, by arrangement with Belgian capital, to unite in one productive system the colliery industries of the Nord, the Pas de Calais and Belgium.*

This arrangement could, however, only be arrived at in conflict with the German capital already involved in its development and by agreement with Great Britain, the friend and patron of Belgium.

To safeguard the Nord—producing three-quarters of her coal—and the Meurthe and Moselle—producing nine-tenths of her iron-ore—as well as to extend the areas of exploitation was possible if only she could pick a quarrel with Germany in which she could throw one great industrial rival against the other.

France learned the lesson of Fashoda and set herself to teach Britain, who never needs much instruction in such cases, the lesson of the German Navy Law.

First, Germany must be destroyed and, if possible, argued the bourgeoisie, the typical bourgeoisie of France, dispossessed of both her iron and her coal. Then, Britain, weakened in the struggle, might be overwhelmed in a second conflict with the already powerful and increasingly ambitious Empire of the United States.

Cold, calculating, relentless, ruthless, inexorable logic of the most true-to-type bourgeoisie in all the world, logic such as we are familiar with as the logic of M. Poincaré, mathematician, Premier of France and tool of the Comité des Forges, is it not thus that the *haute banque*, i.e., French high finance, may have argued it out amongst its own experts and advisers?

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