



The French Press Warms Up to LBJ

EDMOND TAYLOR

PARIS
“WITH the resolute spirit that has won him his Washington reputation as a doer,” a French editorialist said recently, “President Johnson has undertaken to clean up a century-old aftermath of the bloody and atrocious War of Secession. Nobody in the United States has dared before to challenge this famous Ku Klux Klan . . . In doing so LBJ joins the tradition of his great predecessors—Roosevelt, La Guardia, J. Edgar Hoover, Bob Kennedy—who have successively fought against bootleggers, gangsterism, prostitution, McCarthyism, and corrupt labor unions.” Though the pantheon of American folk heroes to which Mr. Johnson is thus elected may look somewhat mixed, not to say confused, in American eyes, the French journalist’s complimentary intent is unmistakable. The fact that the editorial appeared in the Gaullist daily *La Nation* does not necessarily indicate a high-level decision to abate the anti-American campaign that the government-controlled electronic media and part of the French press have been conducting for more than a year. What is significant is that for some weeks past both the Gaullist and the opposition press have reflected a new

and generally more favorable image of the American President in the French public mind. The United States remains the butt of nationalist prejudice or suspicion. American policy in Vietnam is under concerted fire from Kremlin-directed political warfare and local opportunism or defeatism, but LBJ himself is usually spared. In fact, his personality has suddenly become a major U.S. psychological asset in Europe.

The phenomenon is all the more striking because until quite recently even the most pro-American elements in France seldom voiced anything approaching admiration for Mr. Johnson’s character and attainments. The portrait that the anti-American press offered the French public was a grotesque and vicious caricature. The one virtue LBJ appeared to possess in French eyes was that of not being Barry Goldwater. Various factors contributed to the relatively unfavorable French impression of Mr. Johnson: the extravagant European Kennedy cult, systematically exploited by some French and American admirers of the murdered President to diminish his successor; the combined impact of Communist and Gaullist anti-American propaganda, focused on

Johnson as a major target; and most lately, the sniping from French columnists and editorial writers who oppose his Vietnam policy.

THE CHANGE in the French attitude began early this year when the French press discovered that LBJ’s pursuit of the Great Society was in earnest. “President Johnson has wisely decided to go down in American history as a leader who introduced more justice into American society,” wrote the left-nationalist *Combat*, hitherto no great admirer. Then came the civil-rights message to Congress, which stirred real enthusiasm here. “President Johnson,” *La Nation* editorialized on March 17, “has just delivered an address on justice worthy of his ardent predecessor and of the great Abraham Lincoln.”

When the President launched his attack on the Ku Klux Klan, anti-American propagandists here found themselves suddenly embarrassed by the weird myths about American public life they had been toiling for more than a year to implant or fortify in the French mind. America, they had been saying, is virtually ruled by a vast conspiracy of right-wing terrorists, political bigots, and gangsters, covertly supported by Texas millionaires, the defense in-

dustries, and war hawks in the government. Despite the findings of the Warren Commission, it was this Mafia that had assassinated President Kennedy; the killers had accomplices in the FBI, the Pentagon, and perhaps, some Gaullist organs seemed to hint, in the White House itself.

The result, when President Johnson denounced the Ku Klux Klan—assumed to be an American counterpart of the Secret Army Organization in Algeria or of the prewar Cagouards—was a reaction of mingled admiration and dread on the part of the French public. The President's stand seemed so courageous as to be almost foolhardy. "Rifles with telescopic sights are still sold freely in the United States," *La Nation* warned darkly.

The unpalatable facts could not be avoided: whatever his faults, LBJ was evidently a man of character. Even his Vietnam policy, it was reluctantly agreed, proved that. "Of course President Johnson is being misled by the Pentagon," a French friend of mildly leftist opinions said to me, "but I don't believe any more that he's a mere puppet in their hands. He is taking the action that he himself thinks is right."

A Grudging Respect

As the President stuck doggedly, day after day, to the course he had set for the nation, despite the rising clamor at home and abroad for negotiations, despite criticism from what the French think of as the overwhelming majority of the U.S. press, including the *New York Times* and Walter Lippmann, respect for him as a leader increased, even among Frenchmen who strongly fear or disapprove the direction in which he is trying to lead. Perhaps Mr. Johnson reminds them of someone they know.

Nicolas Chatelain, the Washington correspondent of *Le Figaro*, one of the few French journalists who take a relatively unmythological view of the United States, helped the favorable evolution of the Johnson image here with a dispatch pointing out the parallel between the President's policy toward the Ku Klux Klan and his policy toward the Vietcong. "In the one case as in the other," Chatelain asserted, "a prov-

ocation is involved. Johnson considers he has been defied and therefore cannot honorably dicker with the adversary."

René Dabernat, an influential commentator writing in the country's most popular mass-circulation weekly, *Paris-Match*, criticizes Washington's "psychological error" in the use of non-lethal gas, and warns that U.S. intervention in the Vietnam war will eventually prove self-defeating unless it is accompanied by a program of constructive peace aims, but he offers the most basic defense of President Johnson's Vietnam policy yet presented the French public.

"America has discovered," Dabernat writes, "that the European withdrawal [from Asia] it originally desired has offered a springboard to Communism instead of providing a basis for peace. This has happened not because decolonization was unnecessary, but because it has been too often accompanied by immediately exploited humiliations or defeats of the white nations. Dien Bien Phu was followed by the Algerian war . . . Suez, etc. The retreat of a white power much greater than France—namely the United States—would entail much more weighty consequences. That is why President Johnson decided to call a halt."

Dabernat's editorial comment capped an illustrated report from two *Match* correspondents in South Vietnam, Jean Durieux and Daniel Camus, both veterans of the French campaigns in Indochina, demonstrating that thanks to our air attacks on North Vietnam, the ground war in South Vietnam has changed radically for the better.

The *Match* article has since been corroborated by Max Clos, the *Figaro* correspondent in South Vietnam, and by Georges Chaffard, writing in the weekly *L'Express*. Chaffard's testimony in favor of Johnson's Vietnam policy is all the more striking because it is both unintentional and informed. This leading neutralist journalist has recently returned to Paris from the neutralist conference at Pnompenh and also, according to *L'Express*, from a sojourn with the Vietcong. Contrary to a widespread belief in Europe, the new U.S. bombing policy, Chaffard says, is really weakening the guerrillas by cutting

down the flow of military supplies from the North. Chaffard also pictures the Communist leaders in Hanoi as dreading the destruction of North Vietnam's industrial equipment, which has been built up at the cost of immense effort and sacrifice. Above all, Chaffard stresses the impact of the policy change on South Vietnamese morale. "The show of force by the U.S. aircraft," he writes, "the establishment of Marines in central Vietnam, the utilization of new weapons, the relative passivity of China and Russia have had the effect of checking the pacifist tide that was beginning to sweep everything before it in Saigon. The capital is no longer sure that the Vietcong guerrillas are necessarily the future victors. America's determined stand has made people reconsider."

OF ALL the inadvertent propagandists for President Johnson here, the weightiest, however, is undoubtedly Jean-Paul Sartre, who at the beginning of April gave the weekly *Nouvel Observateur* a much-publicized article telling why he had turned down an invitation to visit the United States for a series of lectures. It would be a waste of precious time, Sartre explained, to make the trip just to encourage American intellectuals like the Cornell professors who invited him to criticize the administration's Vietnam policy. "No discussion is possible," he wrote, "unless there is already a basis of agreement to question the whole American imperialist position, not only in Vietnam but in South America, in Korea, and in the entire third world." The arousal of American opinion, the reluctant Nobel Prize winner continued, "can only be brought about through some extreme crisis such as a military disaster or the serious threat of a world war. . . . If the Americans are driven out of Saigon," Sartre argued, "there will be repercussions throughout the third world and eventually disorders in Latin America."

Revolution in Latin America is, of course, the supreme Sartrian goal. Sartre's article may dispel the doubts some Americans and friends of America still hold concerning the wisdom of President Johnson's decision not to retreat from Asia.

VISTA: A New Kind Of Public Service

HANNAH LEES

THE Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), who are in fact the domestic Peace Corps, represent a small but potentially important development in President Johnson's war against poverty. The first eighty-five members are now at work, and another sixty-eight are in training. More than fourteen thousand have applied, and in the most recent tally, 1,360 applications had been received in a single week. By the end of June, VISTA hopes to have 2,000 volunteers around the country. This is hardly an army, but then, the Peace Corps, which now has ten thousand at work around the world, trained only nine hundred in its first year.

Just what needs to be done, who are available to do it, how they should be trained, and what the probable cost would be were thoroughly explored in 1962-1963 by a cabinet-level study group appointed by President Kennedy and headed by Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General. The document it produced, *Information on a Proposed National Service Program*, became the blueprint for the present VISTA operation. The study group's findings and recommendations were translated into a bill that passed the Senate in 1963. Opposition in the House, however, delayed final passage until last August, when it was included as one of the final provisions of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The program was named VISTA rather than the domestic Peace Corps because the act establishing the original Peace Corps stipulated that no other organization could use the same name.

VISTA is much easier to qualify for than the Peace Corps, and its selection methods are pleasantly un-bureaucratic. Until the volunteer arrives for training, there is no personal interview or physical examination. Selection is done through brief forms that the applicant and eight people who know him are asked to fill out, giving an indication of his

character, capabilities, and interests. The applicant is asked where he would most like to serve. Enlistment is for one year. VISTA officials are making the reasonable assumption that no one will go to the trouble of getting eight references for a rigorous, essentially nonpaying job unless he really wants it. They have also tried to plan six-week training courses sufficiently realistic and difficult for candidates to weed themselves out.

Wherever There Is Poverty

After they have been trained and formally accepted, the volunteers are assigned to local programs that have asked Washington for help; migrant camps, Indian reservations, urban-renewal projects, rural education projects, and schools for retarded children have a high priority. Once assigned to a project, the volunteer becomes an integral part of its working force and is responsible only to his local superiors, who may even pay his board and room if their budget permits. Normally VISTA expects to support most of its volunteers. Estimates of their subsistence allowances run from around \$2,000 a year for volunteers on Indian reservations or in hospitals to a little more than \$3,000 for those who have to rent rooms in cities. During the volunteer's tour of duty, VISTA will also bank \$50 a month, which he will be paid at the end of his enlistment.

It is, of course, too soon to know how effective the volunteers will be, but it might be useful to take a look at a few of them to see how their backgrounds and basic abilities have fitted them for the work that VISTA expects them to do in the next year.

For instance, sixty-six-year-old Jay Holmes retired in 1959 as a superintendent of schools in Michigan. His wife, who is three years younger, had taught before their marriage and done various volunteer tasks

since then. They are starting work at a migrant-labor camp in California, where they will live with the laborers, helping them improve their housing and housekeeping, teaching illiterate adults, and trying to prepare their neglected pre-school children to go to school with average children. Since this is largely a Spanish-speaking group, the Holmeses are hard at work learning the language.

Althea Bee Wolcott, a tall, energetic woman of seventy-three, was a physical-education instructor at Wisconsin State College. She has been assigned to a remote area in the Kentucky mountains where some community-action programs are now starting under a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity. Ten VISTA volunteers will go there eventually, but as the first she will be on her own to begin with. Her main tasks will be to develop recreational facilities for teen-agers, tutor school dropouts, and try to broaden the cultural experience of pre-school children.

Clarence Willingham, a twenty-four-year-old Negro from Georgia, was turned down by the Peace Corps because he has two artificial legs. He is an expert in electronics and has tutored other youngsters for fun. He has been sent to a school for retarded children in Donelson, Tennessee.

Projects in Carolina

These three volunteers and nine others began their six weeks' training on January 4, under the supervision of the North Carolina Fund. This fund, established in 1963 by a group of private citizens headed by former Governor Terry Sanford, has been given \$9.5 million—\$7 million from the Ford Foundation and the balance from the local Reynolds and Babcock Foundations—for a four-year attack on poverty in the state. A hundred North Carolina college students were recruited last spring (seven hundred applied) to take a few days' intensive briefing under the direction of the University of North Carolina and then go out in groups of ten for two and a half months of supervised work in newly organized action programs at the community level. The students helped to improve housing and worked with