

Gaullist leader Michel Debré demands a strong America

by Garance Upham Phau

"I would venture to say that the monetary policy of the United States has been and remains an essential element in the undermining of the confidence of many in the values of the Atlantic Alliance." This statement was made Jan. 29 to an American audience by a leading French statesman, former prime minister and current presidential candidate Michel Debré.

Debré came to the United States on Jan. 29-31 with a very strong message for the Reagan administration and the American public: that the present state of "disorder" in the Western world, to the point of internecine warfare on all economic fronts, will lead to a third world war and possibly the end of civilization as we know it.

What Debré asserted is that the United States cannot claim to provide the leadership of the West while refusing to consider the state of the entire world economy. Speaking to an audience at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies Jan. 29., Debré said "We live with inflation as many men live with alcoholism. It takes 20 to 30 years before a man soaked in alcohol is taken to a hospital or a mental home. It takes just as long for a nation hit by inflation to realize that its strength is failing."

What is forgotten today, he continued, is "how a serious economic crisis once brought on Nazism, and Nazism brought on war." Leaders in the Western world can no longer ignore the plagues of unemployment and inflation undermining the citizenry's confidence in the free system. To do so is to let the Soviets dominate the world and ask for nuclear destruction.

For an economic recovery in the West, a new monetary system is required, he concluded. "We have in Europe a tentative monetary system. It is only an attempt, and I am sure that for the Western world it is insufficient. What I think is necessary is to have something closer to the European Monetary System for the Western world." Debré added expanding the European Monetary System, which was set up in 1978 by French President Giscard and West German Chancellor Schmidt, lacked only "political will"—political will on the part of European leaders to initiate Phase Two of the EMS, the European Monetary Fund, and the political will for the United States and other nations to join such

a system and re-establish monetary order and growth potential.

For Debré, political will comes from patriotism; the citizenry's sense of responsibility to the nation that President de Gaulle mobilized in France was also fundamental to the creation of the United States. "Americans would not have been able to make America . . . if they had not been animated by a profound sense of patriotism."

About Debré

Michel Debré was a lifelong close associate of General de Gaulle and was instrumental in establishing the Fifth Republic, as he drafted its constitution and helped to develop the institutions which gave France a seven-year presidential term protected from ministerial crisis, parliamentary turbulence, or watergating press operations. These strong institutions have come under fierce attack from the Socialist International and the anglophile press corps including the French *Nouvel Observateur*, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* and the *London Observer*, which slander the Fifth Republic as "a monarchical system" and Giscard d'Estaing as "a man who wants to be king."

Debré was prime minister under de Gaulle from 1958 to 1962, and oversaw the introduction of a method of state planning that yielded unprecedented growth and technological achievement, including the buildup of France's atomic deterrent and the launching of its massive civilian nuclear energy program. Debré later served as foreign minister and then as defense minister, under President Georges Pompidou until 1973.

The French elections

Debré's candidacy unquestionably elevates the electoral debate in France. He shares with de Gaulle a totally uncompromising attitude regarding his ideas, and above all a commitment to the nation, not a common commodity on either side of the Atlantic. His qualities of statesmanship are illustrated by his refusal to state his disagreements with President Giscard's policies before a Washington, D.C. audience as improper under the circumstances.

Debré is now providing leadership to a Gaullist movement otherwise left with the opportunistic presidential candidate of the RPR (Gaullist) Party, Jacques Chirac, and his campaign manager, the Corsican Charles Pasqua, has had close business ties to the Venturi brothers of "French Connection" fame, once the biggest importers of heroin into the United States.

The Chirac-Pasqua gang railroaded the nomination of Chirac as the Gaullist RPR Party candidate at its congress the weekend of Feb. 7. Chirac won the electronically monitored vote by 95.4 percent, with 2.9 percent going to Debré, and 0.3 percent for Giscard.

Pasqua stated at the congress that "those pushing Debré are criminals. The 'steamroller' [Chirac's nickname] will start. The current around Chirac will sweep away everything."

How the "steamroller" will "sweep away everything" was made clear by old-time Gaullist Maurice Druon, writing in the regional paper *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*. Druon intimated that Chirac and his friends were threatening local RPR officials supporting Debré, with no party backing in upcoming legislative elections, and even that alternative RPR candidates would run against them. Debré politely accused Pasqua of being "detrimental to Gaullism" and charged that there were attempts to "destabilize his campaign."

Debré's candidacy will counter the scenario of Norman Birnbaum, organizer of the Socialist International conference in Washington, D.C. last December, for a convergence in the second round of the elections between Chirac and Socialist Party candidate François Mitterrand to defeat Giscard at all costs. Birnbaum went so far as to mention a plan under study for Chirac to become prime minister under a Mitterrand presidency.

'Cold war or talks'

Debré received no better treatment at the hands of the French press than he did from the American. The conservative daily *Le Figaro* called his message on the need for a Western economic recovery a pure-and-simple crusade against the Soviet Union, and claimed that Debré agrees with Alexander Haig on this score.

In fact, at a Jan. 30 National Press Club breakfast, when Debré was asked whether he agrees with President Reagan's tough remarks on the U.S.S.R., he replied, "I think that behind what Mr. Reagan said there is the will to strengthen the United States in order to hold discussion with Russia on a different basis. On this point I think he is right. In any case, I say the same thing to the French. I believe in the value of détente and entente with the Soviet Union on two conditions: that we demonstrate our resolve domestically and increase our strength, and that we clearly hold on to the idea that we know competition with the Soviets strategically and

ideologically will not cease."

When, at the same breakfast, Debré was asked his thoughts on SALT, he responded, "Either one returns to the Cold War, or one returns to discussions, and it seems to me that we will return to discussions."

EIR's Garance Upham Phau interviewed former French Prime Minister Michel Debré in Washington, D.C., Jan. 30.

EIR: You have just met with representatives of the new American government. In your opinion, what are the prospects for a better understanding between France and the United States?

Debré: The American leaders—as far as I can tell after a short visit—have the desire to strengthen American affairs, economic affairs, financial affairs, political affairs. At the same time, these leaders want to restore the United States to an important role in world affairs. It seems to me, from the French point of view, that it is important for the United States to be a strong country.

It is the responsibility of France, in other words the responsibility of Frenchmen, to pursue the defense of our interests, of our ideas—in short, to be able to combine cooperation and independence.

EIR: Do you think that the election of Mr. Reagan marks an awakening of American patriotism, as some observers have noted, and do you think such an awakening would be beneficial?

Debré: It seems to me that patriotism *has* been awakened; this comes especially from the grave circumstances of the Iran hostages, and also it comes overall from the sentiment that the United States—which the Americans thought was the foremost power in the world—had somewhat lost the initiative. I am convinced that, in the world of today, the nations that will be on the winning team of world competition are those inspired by patriotism. I wish that for France. Thus I can only regard with pleasure the patriotism of the Americans.

EIR: What do you think Americans should know about the French presidential elections?

Debré: They should know that for France, what is at stake is France's recovery, or, on the contrary, her acceptance of a mediocre situation. What is also at stake, because of the communist and socialist theories, is either that a certain kind of economy will continue or else it will be abandoned. As far as I am concerned, I am convinced that Frenchmen want to keep a liberal type of economy. My wish is that Frenchmen fight, beyond that, for the recovery of their country.

EIR: I was going to ask you a follow-up question as to whether it is in the United States' interest to see [Socialist

Party presidential candidate] François Mitterrand defeated; but you have already answered that question in a way.

Debré: The interest of the United States is that France be strong.

EIR: On Jan. 29, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, you said that in Europe there was “an attempt at forming a new monetary system, the European Monetary System, but this is insufficient.” Could you explain to the American public what kind of monetary system you view as desirable?

Debré: For many years I have been convinced that one can only fight for economic development and social progress with a healthy currency, that is, on the basis of a monetary order. The monetary order established by the Bretton Woods convention has been destroyed.

Since then, under the pressure of the American Treasury, and with the too-easy acquiescence of the European governments, the monetary system has been abrogated. Eminent economists heap praise on floating exchange rates, and it is true that powerful nations and wealthy nations can play on the value of their currency and get temporary profits out of that game.

But the monetary disorder created by inflation worsened inflation in turn, and the social and political consequences of inflation are terrible for the free world. Thus I believe that, midway between the Bretton Woods system and the present disorder, we must find a form of discipline. A discipline that imposes upon all nations, be they big and rich or less big and less rich, the obligation of putting the constraints of relative monetary stability within their economic policy thinking—and this is what certain European nations have attempted with the European Monetary System. But, in my view, it is clear that the development of the Western economies demands that the principles that are at the basis of the European monetary order be spread to the whole of the Western world, and to the economies that are related to it. It is, it seems to me, a necessary condition to remedy a monetary disorder whose political consequences are overlooked by the economists’ theories.

EIR: The monetarist ideas of Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek have acquired great influence, and not only in Thatcher’s England. It is fashionable to say that the era of high rates of growth will never return and even that they generated today’s inflation. Do you think that a return to the policies of high economic growth, such as those implemented by you and Jacques Rueff under General de Gaulle, is possible and necessary, for France as well as for other countries?

Debré: I situate myself as a political man; there exists economic competition, which manifests itself as a currency war, an oil war, a trade war, a war of investments. It

benefits some and undermines others, but above all it leads to major political difficulties.

It seems to me that the problem is the following: will the nations of the free world be able to stop the growth of unemployment and to provide a dignified life to all men and women? I am not an a priori proponent of a strong monetary system, nor of a policy of strong growth. As a political man aware of the risks the world is facing, I say that if there is not an effort to remedy unemployment, we are going very far into decline.

EIR: The Third World suffers, as you know, from the imposition of Malthusianism by the International Monetary Fund and the Club of Rome. Do you think, as de Gaulle said in 1945 and repeated throughout the 1960s, that the major task of this century remains the elevation of the Third World?

Debré: I am convinced that the responsibility for us rich nations is very heavy. There is a considerable effort that must be accomplished because the problem facing the starving countries, the developing countries, are key ones for war or peace in the coming years.

On this point the report of [World Bank President] McNamara, a recent report, seems to me to be very clear. The problem, from a financial standpoint, is the following: One cannot help those countries by lending them money they cannot pay back. One cannot help those countries through industrial development based on the cheapness of their labor. One can only help those countries by developing their agricultural capacities and their industrial capacities, under conditions adapted to their situation and by taking that aid out of the revenues of rich countries.

Thus, there is a whole policy to be defined, and it depends to a large extent on the success of the economic recovery [in the advanced sector], because it is clear that if the free world continues to experience economic difficulties and unemployment, it will not be able to face its obligations toward the Third World.

EIR: In the daily *Le Monde* a few months ago, you criticized the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community [EC] and proposed a policy of food exports to Africa.

Debré: Yes, this is a special case, but a very important one. The orientation of the EC in terms of agricultural policy is toward a decrease in production and a refusal to maintain surpluses. But, if it is absolutely indispensable to help certain Third World countries to develop their agriculture for many years to come, the Third World countries will need us to bring them food and nutriment, and one can only do so if countries such as the European Community members have agricultural surpluses. This is why I am rather severe on the Malthusian tendencies of the EC leaders at the present time.