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FOREIGN NATIONALITY GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES
MEMORANDUM TO THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC SERVICES
FROM THE FOREIGN NATIONALITIES BRANCH

Number 8-240

23 August 1944

POLITICS VERSUS ACADEMIC
FREEDOM IN THE ECOLE LIBRE

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In recent discussions of its political activities and affiliations, two groups emerged from the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes, in New York City, ~~one determined to preserve academic freedom~~, the other anxious to have the Ecole promote actively the de Gaulle cause. The matter came to a head with a request by the Department of Justice that the Ecole register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. An exemption formula has been found providing that no more than twenty per cent of the school's faculty and board shall have political affiliations. Friends hope that the institution will now recover from the damage to its prestige.

File

THE interest of the French here was recently aroused by a struggle which broke out at the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes, a university established two years ago by a group of exiled French and Belgian professors in conjunction with the New School for Social Research in New York City. This struggle, which resulted in the resignation of the chief administrative officers of the institution, was touched off by the request of the Department of Justice that the Ecole Libre register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, since it was subsidized by both the Belgian Government-in-Exile and the French Committee of National Liberation. The Department

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of Justice in making this request was also taking into account the fact that in spite of the Ecole Libre's primary function as a university, it had frequently sponsored events of a political nature, and also that many of its French faculty members were at the same time affiliated with organizations designed directly to foster the cause of the French Committee.

In the ensuing feud, which in the end had become a matter of concern both to the French Delegation and to authorities in Algiers, the directing figures at the Ecole Libre became roughly divided into two factions. One group, including the president, the philosopher Jacques Maritain, was chiefly interested in defending the principle of academic freedom and was in favor of eliminating any members and activities which would require the school publicly to be labeled an agent of the French Committee; their opponents desired on the contrary to register outright under the Foreign Agents Registration Act in order to be able to continue, and even to increase, their political activities. By many of the scholars involved it was felt that the questions that had arisen concerned not only the immediate fate of the Ecole Libre, but also its whole future as a means of Franco-American intellectual liaison after the war.

A compromise formula was finally found which proved acceptable to the Department as well as to Dr. Alvin Johnson, director of the New School for Social Research, of which the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes is a part. Whether the compromise solution will prove to be stable remains to be seen. Although their aims were greatly modified, it is the more politically minded group that is now in control of the administration. Many of their colleagues are still far from appeased, and much depends on whether the

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anthropologist Paul Rivet, at present cultural attache of the FCNL in Mexico, who was chosen to succeed Maritain as president of the Ecole Libre, will agree to accept the post. A larger question, which, however, will probably not alter the main lines of the conflict, is of course now posed by the possibility that many of those involved will shortly be able to return to their own country.

*Purpose and Personalities
of the Ecole Libre*

The Ecole Libre was founded in February 1942 in conjunction with the New School, as "a permanent institution of higher learning," by a group of French and Belgian professors living in the United States. It received a \$10,000 grant from the Belgian Government-in-Exile, and shortly afterwards began receiving a monthly subsidy of \$1,000 -- now raised to \$3,000 -- from the Fighting French. Its first president was the eminent educator and art historian Henri Focillon, who died later in the year and was succeeded by vice president Jacques Maritain. The two other original vice presidents were the Belgian Byzantine scholar, Henri Gregoire, and the Russian-born French historian, Boris Mirkine-Guetzevitch.

The school, which by May 1942 already had close to one thousand students, soon expanded from its original three faculties of Literature, Law, and Science, headed respectively by Professors Gustave Cohen, Boris Mirkine-Guetzevitch, and Jacques Hadamard. It also included a department of Art and Dramatics under the direction of the well-known movie producer, Jean Benoit-Levy. To these have now been added various departments and sections including an Institute of Sociology, a department of Oriental and Slavic Studies, and several "study centers" devoted to Latin-American affairs. The present faculty consists of ninety-nine members, although some of these,

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such as ~~Henri~~ Laugier, rector of the University of Algiers, and ~~Henri~~ Bonnet, Commissioner of Information in the French Committee, are purely honorary.

A few of the faculty members, including some of those who have been most conspicuous in the Ecole Libre's affairs, enjoy only a mediocre reputation in academic circles, and have caused a certain amount of criticism to be leveled at the school as being run by "opportunists." Several members of the faculty, however, have been among the most universally respected of contemporary European scholars, as well as men devoted to the principle of free intellectual endeavor. This spirit, and the high academic tradition represented by a large part of the faculty, have been responsible for the Ecole Libre's success and also for the widely held hope that the institution would be permanent.

*The De Gaulism of
the Ecole Libre*

The Ecole Libre was from the beginning frankly oriented in favor of de Gaulle, an attitude that has come in for more criticism lately than in 1942, when the great majority of the French intellectuals who had come here since 1940 were in sympathy with de Gaulle. In any case, most of the founders of the Ecole Libre did not confuse their support of the Fighting French with the approach of such a purely political organization as France Forever, and at least in theory made opposition to Vichy the only political requirement for membership on the faculty. This meant the exclusion of only two of the Frenchmen then associated with the New School, ~~Louis~~ Rougier, who made no secret of his sympathy for Petain, and ~~Roger~~ Picard, professor of constitutional law. Picard could perhaps have joined if he had cared to; he is not

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generally considered to be a Vichyite and has denounced the Vichy regime in writing (*Pour la Victoire*, 24 June and 1 July 1944), although he was recently charged by the de Gaullist paper ~~France~~ *France Amerique* (16 July) with giving legal assistance to the Vichyite directors of the Bank of France. The only prominent anti-de Gaullist who became a member of the Ecole Libre faculty was the medieval scholar and Christian trade unionist, Paul ~~Vignaux~~, an ardent opponent of Vichy. However, there have always been important differences in the attitude of the "de Gaullist" members toward de Gaulle, and toward the general problem of the relation between a university and a political movement.

One issue which brought these differences into play and elicited accusations of undue political control was the requirement, formulated by the directors at the time of the founding of the Ecole Libre, that faculty members should sign a statement repudiating Vichy and declaring their loyalty to the Fighting French. With this requirement a large part of the faculty complied. Vignaux, however, refused to sign the statement, giving as his reasons, first, his objection to the introduction of a political issue in the administration of a university, and secondly his opposition to certain tendencies of the de Gaulle movement. Others of the faculty, although they did not share the second of Vignaux's reasons, refused to sign the statement on principle, and after some heated discussions of the matter, all were permitted to remain.

*Political Activities
and Affiliations*

Until interrupted by its conversations with the Department of Justice, the Ecole Libre engaged in various activities of a political or semi-political nature in support of the de Gaullist cause. Among the first of these

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extracurricular activities was its collaboration with three other de Gaullist organizations, ~~France Forever~~, the Franco-American Club, and the ~~Free French Relief Committee~~ in the organization of a Free French week at ~~Freedom House~~ in New York City (8-14 July 1942). In 1943 the Ecole Libre sponsored a Bastille Day meeting at the New School which combined intellectual discourses on the literature and history of Bastille Day, with ardent pleas for the recognition of the French Committee by several orators, including Henri Gregoire and Henry Torres of *France-Amerique*. Another highly successful political event held under the auspices of the Ecole Libre was its anniversary meeting last February, which was distinguished by the address of the British Ambassador, Lord Halifax, and which was much publicized in the de Gaullist press here as a celebration of British friendship for the French Committee.

Aside from its official connection with such events, the Ecole Libre is considered to have been involved in political affairs through the affiliation of many of its members with other French organizations in this country, some of them official. Until the recent crisis, those so affiliated included Robert Valeur, head of the French Press and Information Service; ~~Robert Aglion~~ of the French Delegation; Professor Louis ~~Rankine~~ who heads a confidential "Scientific Mission," whose quarters are in the French Delegation in New York; and Francis ~~Perrin~~, now deputy to the Provisional Consultative Assembly in Algiers. Professors Hadamard and Gilbert ~~Chinard~~, among others, are directors of France Forever; and Jean ~~Benoit Levy~~, also a director of the Franco-American Club, has been extremely active in promoting the de Gaullist cause in radio and movie circles, through the channels of the French Press and Information Service. The most direct

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political influence on the Ecole Libre has been that exerted by the cultural attache of the FCNL, Henri Seyrig, who has to approve all the funds received by the Ecole from the French Committee. Of the Belgians, the most prominent political figure is former Premier Paul van Zeeland.

*Semi-Political
Affiliations*

Others of the Ecole Libre faculty are connected with organizations which, while primarily cultural, have served indirectly to create sympathy for the FCNL. The French Republican Committee, whose one entrance into the political scene was the holding of a reception for Minister Henri Hoppenot shortly after his appointment here, is made up almost entirely of Ecole Libre members, as is the editorial board of the magazine *La Republique Francaise*, which is financed by the art dealer, Felix Wildenstein. Although the magazine has no wide influence, the informal weekly gatherings which it sponsored at the Wildenstein galleries during the winter of 1943-1944, were attended by many outstanding representatives of the French colony, as well as of other European exile groups; the impromptu talks given at these meetings under the chairmanship of Boris Mirkin-Guetzevitch were for the most part intellectual rather than exhortatory, but all derived from a common approval of the Algiers regime.

A similar atmosphere prevailed at the "Pontigny" sessions held at Mt. Holyoke College during the summers of 1942 and 1943 under the direction of Dean Gustave Cohen and other Ecole Libre scholars. Founded in imitation of the famous Entretiens de Pontigny in pre-war France, where close to one hundred of the leading intellectuals of Europe used to assemble annually at the Abbaye de Pontigny, country place of the philosopher Paul Desjardins, the Mt. Holyoke sessions consisted of a six weeks' symposium on literature and the social sciences. They were attended by most of the members of the Ecole Libre and

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by French scholars connected with other institutions, as well as by many outstanding American intellectuals. Although the discussions were for the most part not directly political in content, and were sometimes highly abstruse, the gatherings quite naturally served as an occasion for extensive and usually ardent political talk, which by the nature of the participants was mostly de Gaullist in tenor. A leading figure in this as in other activities peripheral to the Ecole Libre was Mirkine-Guetzevitch, whose ubiquity in the New York French intellectual scene has been much resented, and who was deposed at the end of last summer as a director of the Mt. Holyoke Pontigny. The meetings are being held again this summer but, presumably as a result of the Ecole's recent vicissitudes, are being confined to cultural discussions.

*Academic Freedom:
the Maritain Faction*

Having proceeded more or less serenely in this politico-academic fashion for two years, many of the French members of the Ecole Libre were stunned by the suggestion that they were functioning as "agents" of the French Committee of National Liberation. This appellation seemed to them to cast a slur on their intellectual integrity, and to carry a suggestion of political control which they insisted was not warranted by the fact that the Ecole Libre received funds from foreign political sources; in all their work at the school, they said, they had been left entirely free, and they were indignant at what they took to be the implication that they would have accepted subsidies on any other condition.

A further embarrassment was that a good many of the Ecole Libre scholars had never considered themselves "de Gaullists" in any narrow sense, and some of them in private had lately begun to wonder if democratic processes were

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sufficiently guaranteed by the French Committee. This increasingly critical attitude on the part of a section of the Ecole Libre faculty has been particularly noticeable since General de Gaulle's visit to this country in July,* but, even before the visit, was so pronounced as to heighten the distaste of such scholars as Jacques Maritain at the prospect of having a political label attached to them.

Until the meeting of the board of the Ecole Libre in June, this wing, which had the support of all the Belgians on the faculty, was in control of the administration. Being determined at any cost to preserve the appearance as well as the fact of academic freedom (an attitude in which they were morally supported by several American educators including President Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago), they undertook to satisfy the conditions necessary for an exemption under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, agreeing to abstain from political activity and to drop from the faculty all those officially connected with the FCNL. Some of them even discussed the possibility of finding private funds for the support of the Ecole Libre so as to sever their financial dependence on the French Committee and the Belgian Government-in-Exile.

The De Gaulleists On the other side of the conflict was a group led by Professors Claude ~~Levi~~ Strauss, Louis Rapkine, and Jean Benoit-Levy, and considered to be dominated behind the scenes by the cultural attache of the FCNL, Henri Seyrig. Seyrig's role was particularly resented by the "academic freedom" wing, since they felt that he had no

* See "The French in the United States Since de Gaulle's Visit," FN Number 206 of 15 August 1944.

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right to interfere in the Ecole Libre's affairs and especially no mandate to discuss those affairs with the Department of Justice.

The Seyrig faction, which was sharply attacked in two articles in the anti-de Gaullist *Pour la Victoire* (10 June, 24 June), objected to the compromise agreed to by Maritain and Mirkine. They maintained that it would be better to announce themselves openly as an arm of the French Committee, and accused those who preferred not to register of "lack of patriotism." In *Pour la Victoire*, the efforts of the Seyrig group were described as aiming to transform the Ecole Libre into "a veritable propaganda agency"; the paper expressed "consternation" at such a spectacle of French spiritual deterioration, and praised the Belgians and others on the faculty who were trying to keep the school free of "political agitation." The moderate de Gaullists agreed for once with *Pour la Victoire*. All of them, as well as all of the Belgians and the few Italians on the faculty, were ready to resign if the proposals of the Seyrig wing were adopted. This would have left only a handful of the original faculty, and not the most distinguished in the academic field.

The Outcome Another factor which the group favoring outright registration was obliged to consider was that Professor Alvin Johnson was unwilling to have the Ecole Libre continue under New School auspices unless it were purged of political influences. At the board meeting in June, Maritain resigned as president (which he had wanted to do on personal grounds in any case) and Mirkine-Guetzevitch and Alexandre Vovre, secretary general of the Ecole Libre, were ousted from the administration, which was taken over by Levi-Strauss, Rapkine, and Benoit-Levy. The new directors, however, could not carry out their original proposals.

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since Dr. Johnson, who attributed the unfortunate aspects of the situation largely to the activities of Seyrig, was by then prepared to dissolve the Ecole Libre if necessary and form a new group later under a different name. Although the Ecole Libre might have been able to continue on its own, most of the directors felt that their connection with the New School was a vital consideration.

The solution finally reached provided that an exemption formula would be granted to the Ecole Libre if no more than twenty per cent of its faculty and of its board had political affiliations. This compromise was accepted by the "academic freedom" wing as well as by the Belgians, who are now represented on the board by Professor Marcel Barzin. Dr. Johnson has also agreed to the arrangement, although Paul Rivet is still the candidate for president and Johnson had previously expressed doubt as to whether Rivet, although he might technically forfeit his connections with the French Committee, would actually divorce himself from politics on coming to the Ecole Libre. By de Gaullists, on the other hand, Rivet has sometimes been considered to be rather too critical of the French Committee, an attitude which has been ascribed to his staunchly Socialist convictions and connections. He is in any case, widely respected as an anthropologist and as the founder of the Musee de l'Homme, and it is felt that his appointment, which appears to be satisfactory to all factions of the Ecole Libre, will help to restore the now somewhat damaged prestige of the institution.

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