

Friedrich List's collaboration with republican circles in France

by Laurent Murawiec

The following is adapted from a speech delivered to a conference on celebrating Friedrich List held in Cologne, West Germany on June 10, 1989 and sponsored by the Patriots for Germany party.

The great respect which republican circles in mid-19th century France had for Friedrich List, is clearly shown by these words from one of those republicans:

"In Germany, there is a man who is devoid of any honors or titles, of any personal wealth, who has no prestige other than that given by patriotism and talents, but who has become nothing short of a great power. We in France are familiar with this sort of royalty of the mind . . . but on the other side of the Rhine, it has taken on the dimensions of an extraordinary phenomenon. The man to whom we refer is not a religious reformer, nor is he a people's tribune. . . . The man is an economist, whose primary concern is to make his fellow citizens aware of their own material interests. He is backed not by impressionable and excited masses, but especially by the manufacturers. Dr. List is the father of the German Customs Union and of the German railways. Thus, Germany's two most significant accomplishments in the course of the past quarter-century, are his brainchildren. With the advent of the Customs Union, the idea of the German fatherland lost its peculiar vagueness and became reality."

List's ties to France go back a long way, and they turn out to be continuous and extensive. Here I would like to present the two critical elements of this connection. The first of these is of a conceptual nature, and shows List to be in the heritage of the French school of political-economy; the second is of a more personal nature, and shows List as a confidant, friend, and ally of the French republicans who in the 1820s and 1830s were better known as the leaders of the "American party" in France and Europe.

Economic life is a transformational process: Human labor alters nature and creates wealth, which in turn puts mankind into a position to steer its own development. The task of the economic sciences is to methodically understand how to most rapidly speed up the pace of this process. The French school of political-economy has developed this concept of the economic sciences over the course of three centuries.

We do not necessarily have to go all the way back to King Louis XI (1423-1483), whose economic ideas and policies already tended in this direction. Let us begin with the 16th-century scientist Jean Bodin (1530-1596), a follower of Erasmus and the leading figure in the *Politiques*, the group of statesmen and scientists who so powerfully helped King Henry IV (1553-1610) to bring to a close the disastrous Wars of Religions, which had torn the nation asunder for nearly one century, and to rebuild France. Bodin and his cohorts, the king's ministers and his advisers, developed a concept centered around the imposition of protective tariffs with the aim of protecting the development of manufactures, but also as protection against rapacious foreign financial powers. These measures corresponded to Bodin's motto, "*Il n'est richesse que d'hommes*," "There is no other Wealth but Men," a thoroughly dynamic concept of God and the universe, whereby humanity, through its labor, continues God's work.

This concept achieved full blossom under Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), who held the highest office in the kingdom of France from 1661 until his death and who, together with Leibniz, originated the notion which was most crucial for the furtherance of growth. The year 1666 saw the baptism of the Academy of Sciences—the first such scientific institution, whose sole intended function was to make scientific breakthroughs possible, to make these into technological reality, to make them useful for manufacturing, and to instruct engineers and workers in the techniques of their use. Working within the framework of this concept, no objects as such could be considered to be wealth (e.g., the land, money, etc.), but rather solely the process itself, within which wealth is created. "Colbertism" meant the creation of the conditions favorable to speeding up the implementation of what the Academy had spawned—i.e., infrastructure, healthy manufacturing firms, etc.

Colbert's life work was continued by the great administrators of the 18th century, such as Daniel Charles Trudaine "the Elder," (1703-69) who founded the Ecole nationale des Ponts et Chaussées (national school for roads and bridges)—a central state school which tackled the greatest weaknesses of the national economy through the application of the most advanced scientific methods.



Left: French minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-83) put science to work to develop the nation-state; right: Austrian Chancellor Clemens von Metternich (1773-1859) dedicated his life to suppressing science and national freedom.



Just as later, in the early 19th century, Prussian king Frederick William III, after the humiliating defeat he suffered at the 1806 Battle of Jena at the hands of Napoleon, was obliged to turn to the reformers in order to save his country and his own skin, so also in France, war and defeat suffered by the radical and incompetent “revolutionary” extremists, brought a new generation of Colbertistes to power: Lazare Carnot (1753-23), Gaspard Monge (1746-1818), and Jean Chaptal (1756-1832)—two mathematicians and one chemist—who all stood firmly in Leibniz’s tradition. From their new position of power, initially acquired in 1794, they went to work applying the principle of least action to strategy, warfare, economic development, scientific research, and education, a process which in 1794 became incarnate with the founding of the famous Ecole Polytechnique.

In the many capacities they were vested with, in the succeeding 20 years they fleshed out the concept of “productive forces,” as was also done by their friend, the scientist, economist, and statesman François-Pierre-Charles Dupin, to whom Edgar Allan Poe paid special tribute by naming his famous detective Dupin after him. This new science, which was aimed at applying the labor output of technology in order to achieve the highest density of energy throughput, Dupin named the “science of dynamics.”

Chaptal had been invited by George Washington to the United States, where he met Alexander Hamilton, the first American Secretary of the Treasury. When Friedrich List came to Paris for the first time in 1824, Chaptal presented him with an edition of Hamilton’s 1791 tract *Report on Manufactures*, which was the quintessence of the American System of political-economy. Chaptal’s 1805 book *De l’industrie française*, as well as his numerous other writings, were

later systematically cited by List along with those of F.L.A. Ferrier, Dupin, and other collaborators of Carnot and Monge.

The ultimate implications of their theory—namely, the development of national wealth at the expense of domestic and international feudal-oligarchic forces—made it necessary to put into place the political formations best suited to it, i.e., a republic and a republican movement. It was also necessary to conscientiously raise workers’ educational levels, in order to create that “middle class” to which the German “poet of freedom” Friedrich Schiller referred in his 1802 inaugural lecture as Professor of History at the University of Jena—in contrast to the existing system with the feudal lord at the top and the slaves and serfs on the lowest rung of the social ladder.

Anyone who has ever read List’s works, such as his 1827 *Outlines of National Economy* or his 1837 *Natural System of Political-Economy* can easily establish this close affinity and also the identity of the thematic material: List is part of the same school, and it was by no means an accident that it was the ward and adopted son of George Washington, Gilbert de Lafayette (who was also a close friend of Hamilton), who brought List to the United States.

1824: Lafayette and Paris

In his early writings during the time around 1820, one of List’s citations of Chaptal was in a letter he wrote to Prince Clemens von Metternich (1773-1859), Chancellor of the Austrian Empire, dictator of Europe. The letter is said to have sent its recipient into a fit of rage. In 1819 List, in his capacity as “consul” of the *Handelsverein*, met in Vienna with Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the scientist and statesman, and henceforth became on increasingly intimate

terms with the politically defeated, but still hopeful and active circle to which Baron Karl vom Stein (1757-1831) and Schiller also belonged. In 1817 List had begun his collaboration with the publisher, republican leader, and éminence grise Georg von Cotta, who was his guardian and who had good connections to the Humboldts, both of whom had likewise been students at the Ecole Polytechnique. Finally, in 1822 List approached Cotta with the proposal to translate Chaptal's masterpiece into German.

When he later was forced into exile as a member of the political opposition and turned up in Strasbourg, republican friends and confidants soon guided him on the "right path," i.e., to Paris. At the time he was already corresponding with Lafayette, the leading French-American figure who was the living symbol of the European-wide American party. But Lafayette was also the chief of the young American party's intelligence service, the Cincinnatus Society.

I am of the view that List was sent to France by a group around Cotta, first for his own protection; second, so that he could broaden his horizons and could speed his education as a political leader; and third, in order to be presented to the head of the American party's intelligence service. Lafayette had advantages enjoyed by no other European republican at that time, namely, if the oligarchy ever attempted to lay hands on him, America would take this as a *casus belli*. This meant that Lafayette's freedom to act was incomparably greater than that of his collaborators, and thus he played a significant role not only in the selection process, but also in the protection of young, promising republican leaders. In a letter dated to List dated March 1824, Lafayette praises him as "a courageous, distinguished philosophical mind. . . . The spirit of all friends of justice and freedom breathes in you"—a formulation which should be read in light of almighty power of the censors, the supreme power in Europe. The correspondence between List and Lafayette—or rather, what remains of it today—shows evidence of the most careful precautionary measures in this regard. When Lafayette traveled to America for the year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the American War of Independence, with his other purpose being to assist the Whigs in electing John Quincy Adams as President, he chose List from among 100 other candidates, to accompany him there.

List wrote to his wife on that occasion: "Lafayette received us heartily. Then he opened up his entire heart. . . . But my circumstances are such, that he believes he owes it to my person and to the Good Cause, to do everything in his power to help me. The magnificent old man embraced me and moved me to tears" (Letter to Karoline List, April 28, 1824). Unfortunately, List was unable to immediately accept Lafayette's proposal, and spent 10 months in prison instead. But no sooner was he released from prison, than the offer from across the Atlantic was repeatedly and emphatically renewed. And so, in early April 1825, when he crossed the border with his family, List cried out: "Let's go! Let's get

out of the old rubbish of 500 years of infamy, and go into the New World!"

In America, Lafayette introduced his young friend to all of the nation's principal political leaders. He also helped List become accepted into the supremely important Pennsylvania Society, for which List was supposed to formulate the guidelines of the American System. List accompanied Lafayette during his entire triumphal tour through the United States.

What was List's actual mission? A letter to Lafayette, dated Nov. 29, 1827, begins with the following words:

Dear General,

The annexed account will inform you of the success I have obtained by my Essays on political economy. The Pennsylvania Society has engaged me to write a whole work on the American national economy, and I see before me a life full of usefulness in this country, which happy change in my fate I owe to the greater part to you. . . . The members of the said Society are desirous that you, Dear sir, might please to give us some information on the great influence of the French National Polytechnical Institute and pronounce your opinion, which beneficial effects are to be expected if the different states, and the general government of the United States, would imitate France in this respect.

1831: second stay in Paris

A completely transformed Friedrich List—how could it have been otherwise?—decided that he had to return to Europe, in view of the revolutionary upsurge in 1830, which promised to topple the bloody rule of the Holy Alliance. He now had been appointed Consul of the United States by President Jackson, who had been acquainted with him and his works, and, thus enriched with experience and successes, could now reactivate his many confidants of years past, along with the networks of the Cincinnatus Society.

In France, Lafayette had to be satisfied with a compromise: Following the collapse of the Bourbon dynasty in July 1830, he was unable to bring the republic into existence—this would have been the pretext which the czar, Metternich, and the British were waiting for in order to wage war on France. Nevertheless, his republicans were now occupying powerful positions in the new regime, such as Casimir Perier, the speaker of the parliament and later prime minister, along with dozens of other veterans of the circles around Carnot, Monge, and Chaptal. List stayed in Paris from December 1830 to October 1831, and familiarized his friends with the ideas of Hamilton and the plans of the American Whigs.

These circles also included Chaptal's friend, the Baron André de Ferussac (1786-1836), a scientist and an army officer who published the *Bulletin universel des Sciences et de l'Industrie* and was a member of parliament. Another was François-Pierre-Charles Dupin, whom Edgar Allan Poe described so respectfully in the figure of "detective" Dupin,

and whose own book *Les forces productives de la France* was the first to analyze the concept of productive forces in a universal form. Yet another was geologist and mineralogist Pierre Cordier (1777-1861), who had gone to Egypt together with Monge and Napoleon in the last decade of the previous century, and had become one of the leading figures in the industrial development of France, notably as inspector-general of manufactures. List organized engineers and scientists, politicians and intellectuals, including such people as the Duke Elie Decazes (1780-1860), a former prime minister who was anti-British and hostile to the Russians, and who was a significant industrialist in his own right; and the two founders of the newspaper *Le National* and Cotta's correspondents in France, the politician and historian Adolphe Thiers and the railway builder Jean Baptiste Paulin.

During this second stay in Paris, List presented his plan for the national economic development of France: the simultaneous and interconnected creation of 1) a national system of railways, 2) a national paper currency, and 3) commercial banks. His idea was to create favorable conditions for investment in railways through the issuance of money, whereby the commercial banks could be assisted in the creation of this credit. This plan had the marvellous advantage that it bypassed, nay, it short-circuited the Paris-based but Geneva-



The French patriot Marquis de Lafayette during his 1825 grand tour of the United States, when he was accompanied by the young List. This engraving is based on a portrait by American artist, inventor and patriot, Samuel F. B. Morse.

and-Amsterdam-bred Haute Banque, which in the past had repeatedly and vehemently sought to obstruct all forms of economic development.

During 1831, the *Revue encyclopédique* published a three-part series by List on "Ideas on economic, commercial, and financial reforms applicable to France." The articles were widely read, and were later published as a pamphlet by Ferussac's Society for the Spread of Scientific and Industrial Knowledge. The articles represented a deeply-delving analysis of the situation in France and of how the nation could be pushed further ahead. But it also conveyed the author's own stratetgic method, and his rigorous epistemological application of the principle of least action to a concrete situation.

List's influence can certainly not be measured in weeks. But for two and one-half years, France's government and parliament moved in the direction he had indicated, while the circle around List pointed out the precise pathway.

October 1837-March 1840: third stay in Paris

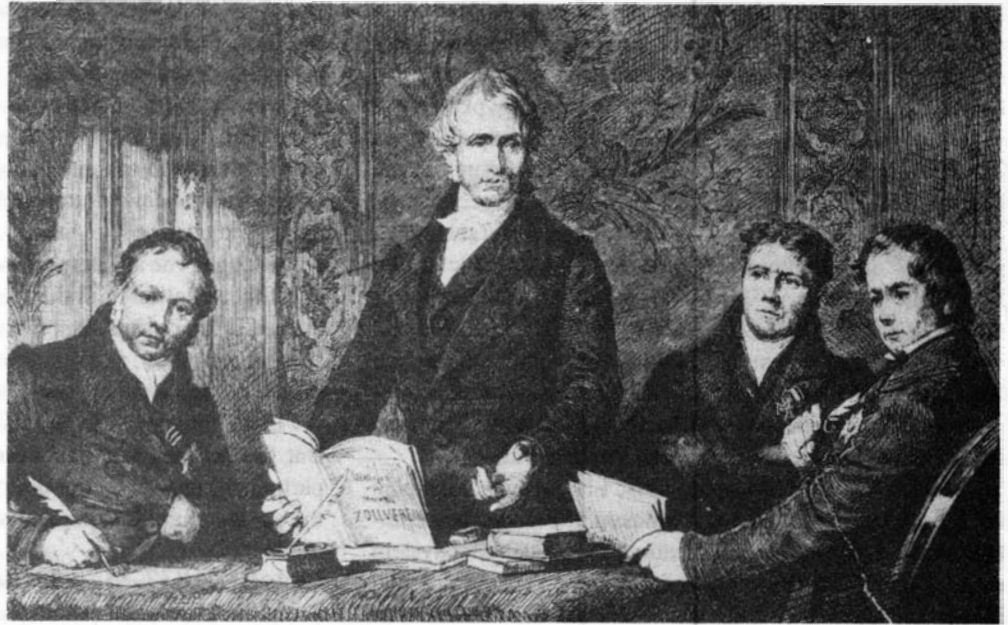
List's third and final stay in Paris was also his longest. He returned to Paris via Brussels, where he had been received by the Belgian King Leopold I, who in turn recommended him to his own stepson, French King Louis Philippe. List's influence, which by then had become enormous, and the unstoppable process which he had set into motion, opened doors which had been closed to him. The French king received List several times in private audience to discuss the latter's proposals. List wrote a memorandum for the French government, and then a shorter version for the king. The king instructed the members of his cabinet to openly collaborate with List—once again, to the great fury of the Paris Haute Banque, the Comte d'Argout of the Banque de France, James de Rothschild, and the Calvinist Hottinguer family.

The memorandum which List presented to the king on Nov. 21, 1837 is a small masterpiece, which further deepens his 1831 proposals for the development of a railway system, a banking system, and credit formation. Inside the French government, the memorandum became the object of wild conflicts, which sometimes came to blows.

The republicans stuck firmly with their concept. Finance Minister La Plage wrote, however, that "Mr. List's project violates all rules and is not even in the form of a well thought-out combination. . . . Such a project borders on the absurd." On the other hand, the minister for public service, Martin, complained that "old models of behavior, ossified customs and shriveled ideas" would prevent the project from succeeding. The general director for road and bridge building flatly stated: "In France, public opinion has such a mistrust of paper money, that, if anyone wanted to halt the development of railroads, all one would have to do is carry out Mr. List's proposal."

Behind all the nonsense, however, there lurked a real power, in the form of a lengthy analysis by the governor of the Banque de France, d'Argout (1782-1858) which the latter

Representatives of the founding states of the Zollverein (Customs Union), whose intellectual author was List. It was the first milestone along the path to a German state.



sent to the French foreign minister, and whose every line was brimming with cold rage and blind hatred. The oligarchy saw itself forced into this flanking maneuver in the framework of its counteroffensive, because it had become clear that List could no longer just be ignored if the attempt were made to prevent List from finally becoming assured of the king's favor. Thus, after it was ascertained that List's memorandum contained nothing new, the claim was made that List has manufactured a quite remarkable admixture of economic growth and monetary policy. The Duke stated emphatically, that his bank was opposed to long-term loans, especially for productive investment, and then generously conceded that "under certain circumstances, railways could be of some use," but that "the author takes us for being more backward than we really are. . . . Without any mature consideration, he has abandoned himself to this mania for great endeavors, as are characteristic of his own country [the United States]. . . . The general committee of the bank is of the opinion, that no further steps should be taken with regard to this project."

A careful reading of List's memorandum today cannot fail to remind one of the memoranda which Lyndon LaRouche had directed over the years to the governments of many nations on the topic of the economic development of their respective countries. And the reactions from the financial world have remained the same, too.

It is quite likely that Heinrich Heine, List's friend and confidant, and the republicans' spy in Rothschild's salon, provided his friend with intimate insider knowledge of the goings-on in the ranks of the financial oligarchy. The Swabian publicist Ludwig Boerne reports, at any rate, that Heine's only qualm against List's European railway network was that

it would then be possible to travel back into the empire ruled by Metternich in only 12 hours.

And even if the king himself was no longer pushing the project forward, the same effect could be seen as in 1831: Just as the railway served as a catalyst for economic development, so List's activities catalyzed the political-economic developments. In 1840 the young engineer Michel Chevalier, whom Thiers had sent to the United States on List's emphatic advice, published a book titled *Lettres sur l'Amérique* which was widely circulated and which furthered the development of the railways. List himself wrote an increasing number of articles directly in French (such as "L'économie politique devant le tribunal de l'histoire" ["Political-economy Before the Tribunal of History"]) in 1838, which contained a forceful and effective polemic against Adam Smith et al.).

In 1840 Thiers made List an extraordinary offer: that List, a German-born American citizen, should become France's minister of transportation. List, of course, had better things to do than become a mere member of a government, and therefore declined. But the offer indicates the level of influence which List had achieved by that time. In a letter he wrote in late May 1845 to a friend, List good-naturedly reported: "Thiers, [the former war minister] Général Bernard, [the education minister] Victor Cousin were my old acquaintances and friends from the time when they were not yet ministers, but poor devils and starvelings." That was only a few months before his final, short trip to Paris, and one year before his death.

The sum of his life, I think, is clear: It is List's own motto, "Et la patrie et l'Humanité." For him, as well as for his French, American, and other republican allies, the worldwide nature of their mission was beyond doubt.