

France and Germany Take New Leadership

by Christine Pierre

The ceremonies organized in France and in Germany for the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Elysée Treaty, constituted an important shift in European politics. In the original friendship treaty of Jan. 22, 1963, President Charles de Gaulle and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer formed a bond between the two nations that healed the wounds of war. Whether the new Franco-German alliance will have such truly historic consequences, will only be seen in the decisions made by Paris and Berlin in the next weeks and months, on two key issues: 1) the war against Iraq and the policies of perpetual war of the hawkish faction in the Bush Administration, and 2) initiatives to solve the systemic crisis presently hitting the dollar system.

On the positive side, Germany and France have reaffirmed their leadership over Europe, to the detriment of British manipulations. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's initial illusions about British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the former's attempts to replace the Franco-German alliance by a triangular relationship with Britain, are long gone; so are those of President Jacques Chirac about building a Europe of defense with Britain.

The celebrations in both France and Germany took on an impressive dimension. On the morning of Jan. 22, a joint Franco-German Council of Ministers meeting was held at the Elysée Palace, with both heads of state attending. Throughout the day, the 900 Franco-German parliamentarians held a joint working session at Versailles Palace. That building was chosen symbolically, as Chirac stated, to exorcise some of the demons that provoked the "fratricidal wars" of the past. "In the Hall of Mirrors," he said, "just a step away from us, [was] the proclamation of the German Empire," and there too were "the conditions imposed on Germany after 1918 which provoked in Germany humiliation and resentment."

Bilateral Ties in a European Context

The joint declaration calls for strong, long-term reinforcement of their cooperation, and commits them to reinforce the European Union (EU). "France and Germany are united by a community of destiny. Our common future cannot be dissociated from that of a deepened and enlarged Europe." The declaration calls for promoting the study of the two languages on both sides of the Rhine—not only by

students, but in all professions, even the European bureaucrats of other countries, who will be encouraged to learn both languages, so that English is not the only language used in official discussions. In foreign policy, France and Germany announced their intention to "seek the adoption of common positions in the international institutions, including the [UN] Security Council, and to define concerted strategies toward third countries."

In economics, two decisions have interesting potential, because they create a forum where France and Germany could develop an approach independently of the rest of the EU institutions, which generally toe the Anglo-American "free-trade" line. The Franco-German Economic and Financial Forum, created by a protocol of 1988, will develop "common positions on long- and medium-term fundamental questions of economic and financial policies such as the financing of pensions, of health, and the labor market." Both countries will also work to create "a European center of international economics," to allow Europe to intervene fully in international debates on economic, financial, and commercial policies.

On defense questions, both countries reaffirmed their earlier proposal to have a common European security and defense policy, initiated by those European states that wish to evolve toward such aims. In terms of aid to development, both countries intend to give priority to the African continent and to the fight against drugs and AIDS, and, in matters of research, both countries wish reinforced cooperation in space policies, but also on ethical questions, such as human cloning.

No Inevitability of War

What is the motivation behind this dramatic rapprochement? There is clearly a preoccupation with the political, economic, and military evolutions on the other side of the Atlantic. "It is urgent that Europe impose itself as an international actor," stated Chirac, in his speech to the Franco-German parliamentarians. "It is today an example for all those who reject the war as being fated. Its dream is not vainglory, but to use its power in the service of peace. It embodies an ambition for humanity. A Europe capable of acting, including in the military domain, is necessary to the world balance."

"The world is confronted with crisis situations on all continents," stated Chirac. "I'm thinking, of course, of Iraq. It's a major challenge. War is not inevitable. The only framework for a legitimate solution is that of the United Nations. France and Germany, in their successive Presidencies of the Security Council, carry on a close collaboration in order to give peace every chance." Responding, at the Elysée press conference, to a question on whether France and Germany would vote together at the UN Security Council against an eventual American demand for war, Chirac didn't go quite that far, but stressed that the Germans and French have the same judgment on that crisis, based on two principles: 1) a decision can only



French President Jacques Chirac (left) and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on Jan. 23, marking the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty. They reaffirmed the alliance between their two nations, with new initiatives for cooperation; but a breakthrough in economic policy has yet to occur.

be taken by the UN Security Council, following the report by the inspectors; and 2) war is the worst solution possible, and everything must be done to avoid it. France and Germany have a common position and are collaborate constantly on this issue, he concluded.

Just as at the time of the Elysée Treaty, the new Franco-German rapprochement and, in this case, its refusal to participate in a senseless war against Iraq, have provoked the fury of the hawkish factions of the U.S. Administration. U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld created a major incident, snarling that very day: “I do not see Europe as being Germany and France. I think that is the old Europe. If you look at the whole of Europe, its center of gravity is in the East.” Revealing the intensity of the tensions on both sides of the Atlantic, French Environmental Minister Roselyne Bachelot, known generally for her lack diplomatic manners, declared that there was only one answer possible to Rumsfeld’s insult: “the words of Cambronne”—one of Napoleon’s generals, whose response, when summoned to surrender, was an unequivocal “*merde!*” Showing the contempt in which the Defense Secretary is held by the Europeans, the entourages of Chirac and Schröder, who were meeting 500 German students in Berlin that day, let it be known that they would not respond to Rumsfeld (notorious in Paris for his “crudeness”), but only to statements by President Bush. Both sides of the Atlantic have attempted to cool down the situation in the meantime, although the divergences remain extremely sharp.

The intelligence leak-sheet *Le Canard Enchaîné* indi-

cated that Maurice Gourdault Montage, a special envoy sent recently by Chirac to meet with members of the Bush Administration, was brutally shouted at by U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz. France is viewed, according to the magazine, as being behind all the attempts to block the United States going to war against Saddam Hussein. The American hawks went as far as threatening to keep France out of any oil deals in Iraq, following an eventual conflict! In a calculated response, Chirac gave an interview to the daily *Le Figaro* on Jan. 20, stating that were the United States to go to war, “it would do so on the margin of the entire international community.” Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin threatened to use France’s veto at the UN Security Council.

Challenges Ahead

While politically and militarily, France and Germany are moving in the right direction, the other great challenge ahead of them is in the economic field.

None of the elements underlined in the final declaration will become a reality, if both countries don’t support Lyndon LaRouche’s proposed global financial reorganization, the New Bretton Woods. From the standpoint of the European Union’s Stability Pact and Maastricht Treaty, Europe is unable to do anything except impose upon itself greater and greater austerity. In a panic, many French financial analysts are carefully watching the German recession, knowing full well that the French economy is next in line.

The two leaders want to reform the Stability Pact, with its straitjacket of fiscal restrictions that are becoming increasingly impossible to adhere to as the world depression deepens. Schröder stated clearly that while both countries support the Stability Pact, they believe that stability, although necessary, is not the only important criterion for the economy. Another is growth, Chirac stated, and therefore both countries have fought for a “flexible interpretation” of the Stability Pact.

However, Chirac’s response to a question from the French magazine *Fusion*, indicates an unwillingness to break with the Anglo-Americans on the key economic issues. The correspondent asked whether the 40th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty were not precisely the right time to revive the best features of the post-war Bretton Woods financial system, given the acute crisis of the dollar system today, but Chirac missed the point, responding that “one cannot remake history, and one does not build the world by looking backwards, at the past.”