

# 2013

## H-Diplo

### H-Diplo Review ESSAY- Response

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Author's Response by H-Diplo by **Jonathan Fenby**, London

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**T**hough I appreciate his kind words about my prose style and wider interpretation, I find some of Prof Wall's strictures of my biography of Charles de Gaulle (H-Diplo 3 May 2013) surprising - though he is quite correct as to my mis-timing of the Nikita Khrushchev speech denouncing Stalin for which I apologise. To take these in order:

Léon Jouhaux did break with the Communist Party after the end of the Second World War, but my only reference to him was in wartime when he was a loyal member - so what is wrong with identifying him as a Communist trade union leader?

I am guilty, indeed, of referring to "Euro-communism" before it had been given that name but the trend was there, for instance in the "Italian" students at Nanterre in 1968 and the arguments of Roger Garaudy before he was expelled from the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) in 1970.

If Prime Minister Pierre Mendès France did not support the idea of a European army, why did he back it in a parliamentary debate which led to the downfall of his government? For sure, he wanted to modify it but that does not mean he opposed the idea.

Professor Wall accuses me of being "confusing" by not spelling out the voting system in the 1958 parliamentary election, which I would dispute, but he then refers to the victorious Gaullist Party as the *Rassemblement du peuple français* (RPF) which had been wound up in 1955. The Gaullists ran in 1958 as the *Union pour la nouvelle république* (UNR). The party did not win a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly as Professor Wall states, but 188 of the 537 seats.

With regard to François Mitterrand and René Bousquet, I was told privately in the late 1960s or early 1970s about their relationship and the former's collaboration, long before Pierre

Péan's book appeared.<sup>1</sup> If I knew, so did a lot of others who did not have to wait till the publication of that volume in the 1990s.

Professor Wall takes issue with me on whether de Gaulle averted civil war in 1958 and commits me to the sin bin of counter-factual history. But the army in Algiers got as far as sending paratroopers to fly to Toulouse who turned back only when their commanders believed de Gaulle was ready to take office. Even if there was not likely to have been a putsch in Paris, a military expedition from across the Mediterranean would have led to something I would call civil war. How would 'a politician who pledged to carry on as before' have succeeded where so many others doing that had failed? Would the centre-right have accepted a defence of the Republic led, in significant part, by the Communists?

On a wider note, Professor Wall says I am "a journalist and writer, not a historian." I am not sure what this is meant to signify, but it does raise the old question of what constitutes a historian. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines him or her as "an expert in or student of history, especially that of a particular period, geographical region, or social phenomenon." In my case, I have written six books on historical subjects including the *Penguin History of Modern China* which was described by a leading academic at Oxford, Professor Rana Mitter, as "the first major history that looks at the country with the eyes of the twenty-first century."<sup>2</sup> I have lectured at Harvard, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge and other universities and hold a research position at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London. I also studied modern history at Oxford. I would hope that all this qualifies me even if I do not have a Ph.D. in the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Péan, *Une Jeunesse Française: François Mitterrand, 1934-1947* (Paris: Plon, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/6300a86a-2de6-11dd-b92a-000077b07658.html#axzz2URejZavm>