



**Allan Mitchell.** *A Stranger in Paris: Germany's Role in Republican France, 1870-1940.*  
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### An Elegant, but Open, Interpretation

Alan Mitchell, who has written substantially on the theme of German-French relations and rivalries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offers in his new book a succinct, elegant essay on Germany's impact upon its western neighbor from the Franco-Prussian War to the defeat of France in 1940. The author presents his argument clearly at the outset (p. vii); namely, that Germany and France constituted the European heartland after the 1870 war and that other European countries, the United States, and the French empire did not influence metropolitan French affairs as extensively as Germany. "After 1870," he writes, "an autonomous national history of France is no longer feasible" (p. viii).

The Battle of Waterloo, Mitchell notes, was the last major European campaign fought before the advent of railroads (p. 4), which ushered in the nineteenth century and played a critical role in the French defeat of 1870. After discussing the context of the Prussian victory, the author devotes subsequent chapters to demonstrating the influence of newly united Germany on Third Republican France in the formation of the republic itself: these include such topics as Bismarck's social welfare model, late-nineteenth-century demographic trends, industrial development, gender relations, higher education, the appearance of a "xenophobic" French style following the Dreyfus Affair, the development of France's Socialist party, and the defeat of 1940. *A Stranger in Paris* is not footnoted, but the author provides a useful bibliographical guide to secondary works in English, French, and German for each of the chapters.

That French political and cultural life was heavily influenced by Germany after 1870 is indisputable, and there can be no quarrel with the general perspective of the work. It might equally well have been entitled "A Stranger in France," however, as its focus falls as much on the entire country as on its capital. It is also true that the Third Republic was confronted with a major German presence in its midst (p. 7) to a far greater extent than were its immediate predecessors. Germany was all but absent in French foreign and internal affairs before 1870, Mitchell writes, because there was no united German presence on France's borders (p. 6). This argument holds true as far back as 1648, but might be tempered a bit in a longer-term perspective to include the Germanic tribes that swept across the Gallic frontiers during the late Roman Empire; the Habsburg threat in the sixteenth century; and even the incursions of Germans into France under the Duke of Brunswick during the Revolutionary Wars.

Some of the measures of German influence Mitchell addresses appear more solidly established than others. The influence of Bismarck's social welfare model on French discourse, if not always policy, is clearly demonstrated (pp. 20-21). German influences on French higher education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when German universities became models for much of the world, are also clearly established (pp. 52-53), as is that of the German Socialist party on its French confrères, especially its leaders such as Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum (pp. 62 and 66).

Other cases are less clear. German influence in Republican France, important as it was, was not equal in all spheres of political and cultural life. Addressing industrial development in the two countries, Mitchell mentions that French industry lagged behind that of Germany, whose imperial state pursued more interventionist economic policies, favoring a higher level of credit banks' participation as well as a cartelization of economic production (pp. 33-34). This point, however well taken, is more a comparison of the two countries than a demonstration of significant German impact upon its neighbor. The chapter on the political status of women in the two countries highlights the unwillingness of Republican France to grant women the vote, in contrast to its German neighbor. Were those who supported suffrage and other gains for women in France in any way influenced by German policies or activism? Lastly, Mitchell's discussion of German influence during the Dreyfus Affair is curiously ambivalent. He rightly points out that without Germany there would have been no affair at all, as Captain Alfred Dreyfus was accused of spying for that country. Rather than an eruption of antisemitism that was a precursor to subsequent European fascism (more specifically National Socialism), Mitchell sees the development of the affair as a consequence of a more generalized xenophobia in France, occasioned by an influx of immigrants far greater than the comparable proportions for Germany and Britain. A large number of Italian, Belgian, and Spanish immigrants prior to World War I was followed by an influx of Poles thereafter (pp. 56-57 and 59). One looks in vain for the German influence in the unfold-

ing of the affair. An introductory discussion at the outset of what constituted German impact in Republican France offering a range of possibilities might have avoided some of the questions of influence versus mere comparison. The author's focus on Germans in France also raises the question of what the Germans themselves thought of the Franco-German relationship during the era of the Third Republic. Friedrich Sieburg's *Gott in Frankreich? Ein Versuch*, first published in 1929 and brought out in a French edition the following year, then republished several times in both German and French, suggests additional dimensions to the Franco-German relationship.[1]

Mitchell has written an excellent interpretative essay highlighting the various roles played by German policies and discourse in Third Republic France. Whether he has established the infeasibility of an autonomous national history of France after 1870 as a characteristic somehow unique to that country remains open to debate. Meanwhile, this short book, long on ideas and filled with useful information, is highly recommended to specialists in German and French history alike, as well as anyone interested in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European history.

#### Note

[1]. Friedrich Sieburg, *Gott in Frankreich? Ein Versuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter SocietÄts-Druckerei, 1929) was translated into French as *Dieu est-il FranÄsais?* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1930). The book was republished in both languages during the German occupation of France in the 1940s and again in the 1990s.

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