

## A Response to Andrew Moravcsik

❖ John T. S. Keeler

Andrew Moravcsik's "De Gaulle Between Grain and *Grandeur*" is a rigorously constructed and generally insightful article that will compel many readers to reconsider their images of Charles de Gaulle and his European policy. I applaud Moravcsik for providing a reminder of how often de Gaulle proved willing to set aside his concerns about European integration to lock in a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) that he viewed as indispensable for France on economic grounds.<sup>1</sup> As a scholar who has written extensively on French agricultural politics and policy, however, I must say that I find some aspects of Moravcsik's historical analysis to be objectionable. In his effort to debunk the notion that de Gaulle should be viewed as a heroic leader standing above interest group pressures and driven primarily by a concern for a unique geopolitical vision, Moravcsik exaggerates the extent to which de Gaulle's agricultural policy represented the appeasement of powerful interests within a backward sector, and he fails to acknowledge that achievements regarding "grain" could indeed be viewed as a potential source of "*grandeur*."

In Moravcsik's account, de Gaulle "viewed agriculture as a backward sector, the promotion of which was not in the national interest," and thus "initially sought to liquidate" the French farmers "swiftly" with a liberal policy of lower prices and lower subsidies.<sup>2</sup> However, "opposition from farmers, sometimes violent, swiftly stymied these reform efforts. Repeatedly during the early and mid-1960s, de Gaulle was forced to reverse course and retain high subsidies"

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1. See John T. S. Keeler, "De Gaulle and Europe's Common Agricultural Policy: The Logic and Legacies of Nationalistic Integration," *French Politics and Society*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Fall 1990), pp. 62–77.

2. Andrew Moravcsik, "De Gaulle Between Grain And *Grandeur*: The Political Economy of French EC Policy, 1958–1970 (Part 1)," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2000), p. 17, and Part 2 in Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall 2000), p. 62. All subsequent references to Moravcsik's article will be followed by part and page numbers in parentheses.

(Part 1, p. 18). Given “the failed domestic reform of agriculture” and “relentless pressure from particularistic domestic interests,” de Gaulle concluded that “the only enduring solution was to export surpluses within a preferential and externally protected European market” (see Part 1, pp. 18, 29, and Part 2, p. 58).

What is misleading about this account is its suggestion that de Gaulle capitulated to an “archaic” group (Part 2, p. 62) and embraced the CAP as a substitute for serious agricultural reform at the domestic level. Moravcsik does not mention that when the Debré government began to retreat from its “experiment in quasi-liberalism” in 1959–1960, it did not revert to the policies of the Fourth Republic. Instead, the government produced an Orientation Law for agriculture that launched an innovative program of structural reform. The legislation was passed despite the staunch opposition of the two most powerful farm organizations and the Senate.<sup>3</sup> During Edgard Pisani’s tenure as minister of agriculture, the 1960 law was reinforced by a Complementary Law (1962), which was unpopular with traditional agricultural interest groups but hailed by progressive younger farmers as “the longest single step yet taken toward genuine structural reform in rural France.”<sup>4</sup> As the reform laws were implemented, a plethora of new agencies and subsidy programs were created to stimulate agricultural modernization and accelerate the rural exodus while maintaining social peace in the countryside. In addition, the Gaullist government used a host of methods to promote the status of reform-minded farmers within agricultural associations and to enlist their collaboration in the administration of the modernization program.<sup>5</sup>

Contrary to Moravcsik’s portrayal, de Gaulle himself did not always rail against the farmers and did not view agriculture as an irremediably backward sector. Indeed, passages in the memoirs of both Pisani and de Gaulle portray the General as impressed with the productivity gains made by French farmers and looking forward to the day when the Republic would “begin to reap the benefit” of the modernization process.<sup>6</sup> De Gaulle thought that agricultural subsidies should “fund progress, not stagnation,” and he viewed the CAP as a valuable tool for changing attitudes and encouraging farmers to become more productive.<sup>7</sup>

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3. Gordon Wright, *Rural Revolution in France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 157–167.

4. Wright, *Rural Revolution*, pp. 169–172; see also Charles de Gaulle, *Memoirs of Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), pp. 157–58.

5. In John T.S. Keeler, *The Politics of Neocorporatism in France: Farmers, the State, and Agricultural Policy-making in the Fifth Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), ch. 2.

6. Edgard Pisani, *Le Général indivis* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1974), p. 80; and De Gaulle, *Memoirs*, p. 158.

7. Pisani, *Le Général*, pp. 65 and 84; see also p. 77, where Pisani stresses that the CAP will open the borders to more efficient producers elsewhere in Europe.

That said, is it possible to argue that de Gaulle viewed the agricultural dimension of the EEC as a means of enhancing French *grandeur*? I have no interest in defending the extreme position that *grandeur* was de Gaulle's primary motivation in pursuing the CAP. However, I do think that de Gaulle's agricultural policy—its European and domestic elements taken together—was consistent with his pursuit of *grandeur*. As discussed above, that policy cannot be reduced to succumbing to interest group pressures and subsidizing a backward sector. The policy did deliver subsidies to many farmers, but it also served to accelerate the modernization process and to transform agriculture—in some key respects—from a burden to a benefit for the Republic. During the first two decades of the Fifth Republic, the percentage of the French work force engaged in agriculture declined from about 20 percent to roughly 8 percent, while France's average annual rate of growth in agricultural productivity (value added per farmer) surpassed that of all other EEC members. The French figure was 4.2 percent compared with 2.9 percent for the entire EEC. The transformation of agriculture thus played a substantial role in what was the most spectacular period of economic growth ever enjoyed by France. From 1959 to 1970 France's average annual rate of growth (5.8 percent) exceeded that of all other West European states and was significantly higher than that for the United States (3.9 percent).<sup>8</sup>

Agricultural modernization and the access to European markets provided by the EEC also resulted in a profound improvement in France's agricultural trade record from the Gaullist era onward. The value of France's agricultural exports increased from 4.7 billion francs in 1960 to almost 64 billion francs in 1979. During this same period, France's agricultural trade balance changed dramatically. Although agricultural imports exceeded exports each year until 1968, the balance became structurally positive in the 1970s. By 1981, the trade surplus surpassed 25 billion francs. Agriculture thus began to serve, in the words of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, as "the oil of France," producing an annual export surplus that largely offset the negative impact of oil imports.<sup>9</sup>

In short, the agricultural reforms launched during de Gaulle's presidency yielded substantial economic benefits and might well be seen as providing France with *grandeur through grain*.

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8. Keeler, "De Gaulle," p. 69.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.