FOREWORD

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ICHEL CROZIER HOPES
that *The Trouble with
America* will help the

country he loves and admires to become more responsive to what he regards as its best imperatives. The United States does frighten him as much as it frightens this writer and other Americans and many Europeans. We are frightened by the periodically subdued provocativeness vis-à-vis the Russians and their client states and by the pursuit, through seeking to build an impregnable defense, of a first-strike nuclear policy. What makes Crozier anxious is the cultural and economic consequences for the United States and for the planet of American political, industrial, and intellectual stagnation. To be sure, there are lessons in the book for the French, concerning whose industrial stalemate and bureaucratic *immobilisme* Crozier has also written. But the main concern is with America. That is very different from Alexis de Tocqueville, who hoped through *Democracy in America* to teach his French conservative or reactionary friends that the United States, and correspondingly democracy, were viable, equitable, though sadly mediocre politics and modes of life. As Cushing Strout once put it, he was thinking of France while looking at America.

Crozier came to the United States right after World War II in 1946 when he was twenty-five years old. Leaving a shattered France, he writes of himself as of that time: "I was a pro-American leftist, a somewhat rare species in France, but one that still could be respectable." He was here for the Henry Wallace campaign in 1948. He was captivated by the America he discovered. He observed many situations and potentials from which French elites could learn in America, and from which engineers, businessmen, and others then proceeded to learn. *The Trouble with America* begins with a discussion of those early buoyant years, with their high expectations, and then proceeds to the current "trouble," which poses the question as to whether a democracy as large, legalistic, and moralistic as the American is governable and capable of incremental change.

The America Crozier sought out on his first visit was the spirited and gregarious one of the labor organizer. He describes in detail his meeting with an old union activist (perhaps David Dubinsky), too old to go to the forthcoming United Auto Workers meeting in Atlantic City, who instructed Crozier: "You have to get to know the country. New York, Washington, that's not America. . . . Discover how huge this country is." Crozier followed the organizer's advice. He found the UAW a center of union idealism. The big unions even supported the generosity of the Marshall Plan. He noted that America's labor rhetoric was then and remains very much less poisonously hate-filled than that of Europe.

Attractively new to Crozier was the emphasis on negotiation and bargaining. "And civilization began with *Robert's Rules of Order* . . . armed with his manual, a good chairman could squelch troublemakers [at the faculty meetings I attend, "troublemakers" know the *Rules* and chairmen are diffident]." Implicit in the insistence on collective bargaining was a naive but marvelously humane confidence in the power of speech: as long as one keeps talking, one is bound to find a solution. Implicit is the judgment that the bosses are not monsters, and that if they can be made to listen, they too will bargain (p. 6). The very term "business agent" rather than "labor organizer" sounds odd to a Frenchman.

There are side glances back to France; for example, the news that English is the language of choice at the new French business school near Fontainebleau. He writes of himself that, like other Europeans, he was at first impressed by American openness. "Those Americans who so often seem incoherent mumblers communicate infinitely better than the French, who are so proud of their artful self-

expression" (p. 133). There followed a period of seeing American relationships as superficial—the quick smile of the salesman. Only later does he appreciate that Americans search for complex human relationships, but find doing so difficult, with any code in a permissive, mobile, and volatile society absent or uncertain.

That volatility is one of the principal themes of the book, which does not pretend to analyze *the* trouble, but to diagnose some troubles. Having seen the unions at first with perhaps a shade too idealistic a vision, he now regards them the way many disappointed liberals do, as conservative where not corrupt, and as obsessed with bargaining, procedure, and legalistic forms that impede productivity and cannot possibly promote the quixotic goals of equality and justice.

I believe that many Americans will be most surprised by Crozier's impassioned critique of what he calls "the delirium of due process." This writer shares much of Crozier's concern with the negative consequences in an individualistic society of everyone's claiming "rights," and also claiming "rights" as members of an ethnic or minority group. Rights of this sort cannot be handled by negotiation or compromise; they are moral abstractions codified in bureaucratic procedure and through litigation. The traditional game of negotiation, that is, the collective bargaining of the unions, is " . . . crystallized into a truly religious movement in which each particular struggle seemed to grow out of a single sacred cause."

One of the "rights" is to penetrate the secrets of those in authority, toward whom there is now a cynicism in America even greater than the habitual skepticism of the French concerning the graduates of the *Grandes Écoles* who presume to govern them. In America in the past "bulwarks of authority, distance, and secrecy have protected those in charge of maintaining peace and leading the commonwealth." Today, having made a scapegoat of Richard Nixon rather than endure cheating in so virtuous a democracy, America has seen its structures break down; these structures cannot exist without at least a minimum amount of tolerance for secrecy. In place of leaders, we have celebrities. Woodward and Bernstein are the heroes of a melodrama.

In addition to discovering on his first visit the new breed of business agents, among whom he was treated as a brother and taken to bars for eager, breezy talk and beer, Crozier discovered the universities, and particularly the newly buoyant and optimistic social scientists. Like himself, many had become sociologists in the hope of bringing about rational, peaceful change in society (he does not allow for those who entered academic life to get their revenge on society). Crozier appreciates how millennial were the early hopes of planners

of the Great Society, along with their academic advisers and supporters. He regards it as no less quixotic for anyone to have believed that it was possible to conduct a rational, limited war in Vietnam, knowing virtually nothing about the country, its history and its peoples.

When Crozier turns his attention to contemporary America, he sees the earlier hopes not so much chastened as turned into a soured individualism. To be sure, President Reagan singing "Happy Days are Here Again" is dreaming, like the Marxists, that one can get rid of history. American youth, however, seems to be singing another song.

American education engrosses Crozier, as it has other observers. The universities seem to him as dispirited or even mean spirited as the unions seem encrusted. It dismays him that students have turned in on themselves. They seem far less curious about the world than they were at the time of his first visit. "Never before have young people been so self-centered and America-centered." He regards American youth in general as precocious, quickly anticipating adulthood, but in other ways as remaining adolescent in being insufficiently socialized, unwilling to participate in community building and preferring what he terms individualistic "affirmative action" as a form of self-protection. He writes, "When every group has access, one way or another, to every decision, one should not be surprised that the upshot is confusion and erratic choices. When everybody is free to go in and out everywhere without shouldering the least responsibility in return, when there is no social or cultural barrier to straighten out the chaos in negotiations, long-term policies are no longer feasible." Even the spread of knowledge is put to use in giving individuals "the luxury of displaying a fine intransigence." Crozier describes his experience in asking Harvard students to give an example of a significant innovation, only to discover that those they can think of have negative consequences, or perhaps some sort of trick. With the overt disappearance of what Crozier terms America's "demon virtue," these students are now more resigned than French students.

In his judgment, the new frontier for America lies in thinking, in intellectual effort, which implies investment in the institutions that make knowledge and understanding feasible. It dismays him that many of the best students go into law, fueling the delirium of due process, or go into business without training in science and technology. Some of these concerns will not be unfamiliar to American readers. The same holds for Crozier's judgment that improvement in the educational process requires putting excellence in learning ahead of justice in allocation of places and results. He sees litigation as a form

of negative participation, the very contrary of the earlier American spirit of voluntary participation which Tocqueville so admired. Correspondingly, Crozier regrets the abandonment of the PTA by career women who are forming their own interest groups. Moreover, the schools as major community enterprises are caught in civil war. Voluntary associations have become, in his judgment, not a set of networks that tie people together, but barricades for self-defense by splintered interest groups, many of them anxious, and ready to be mobilized for reactionary—or, I would add, symbolic—crusades.

Crozier is, however, impressed by American management and by the human relations school of management at the Harvard Business School, along with its virtuoso teaching by the case method. He also appreciates the work of such policy-oriented social psychologists as those he found right after World War II at the University of Michigan, who, like Rensis Likert and Dorwin Cartwright, contended that if people are well treated and warmly responded to, they will conduct themselves reciprocally. He admires them for their experimental outlook and lack of cynicism, although he is himself skeptical of any belief in the fundamental goodness of human nature.

Crozier's America does not include the South. He nowhere deals with the blockages created by federalism as such, but treats the whole country, as many Americans do today, simply as a nation-state. It is a largely secular and cosmopolitan America that he is looking at. When he turns to foreign policy, he sees the Cuban missile crisis as Kennedy's and America's triumph. (In my judgment he does not appreciate the damage done to Khrushchev's reputation in the Soviet Union, leading to his displacement by the less open, less imaginative, and more repressive Brezhnev & Co.; a more mature, less brash American leadership could have handled the situation in a fashion less humiliating to Khrushchev. Nor does he see that crisis as an element in the very American hubris which troubles him in the Reagan administration.)

In the final chapter, "The Challenge Ahead," Crozier discusses the negative outcomes of what have been regarded as the American successes, whether in due process as a system, or in the mass production, mass consumption market or in the egalitarian welfare state: these very advances, when congealed, have become the sources of decline. Previous successes in meeting change have left America with a metaphysic that is unadapted to the present crisis. For example, the protests by environmentalists and others which slow down or even block nuclear power (astonishing to the French in whose country, in the absence of antitrust laws, all nuclear plants have been built to the same careful specifications) are based on the belief that only principles

should count and that, whatever the long-term public interest, people should be encouraged to insist on their rights in a completely unilateral fashion.

If I have suggested that *The Trouble with America* resembles the plaintive song of a disappointed admirer, I would give a wrong impression. Crozier remains an exuberant explorer. He does see the United States as suffering long-term consequences from its sclerotic legalism, its hostility to organization, its worship of the Constitution (an assertion I am inclined to doubt—if we continue to tinker with the Constitution, we may find ourselves repealing the Bill of Rights quite readily). His curiosity about the United States, in all aspects within his purview, remains.

Crozier cares, but he does not preach. He illuminates his vision of what might some day become an only incrementally expansive and manageably reformed America. More the searcher and less the reformer than he was in 1946, Crozier hopes that he will be listened to by thoughtful Americans, and that his book might make a bit of difference in how we see ourselves and hence how we might behave. I share that hope.