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The remarks that follow are sufficiently banal so that I feel that an apology is in order to *reasonable* people who may happen to read them. If there is, nevertheless, good reason to put them on paper — and I fear that there is — this testifies to some remarkable features of contemporary French intellectual culture.

Before I turn to the subject on which I have been asked to comment, two clarifications are necessary. The remarks that follow are limited in two crucial respects. First: I am concerned here solely with a narrow and specific topic, namely, the right of free expression of ideas, conclusions and beliefs. I have nothing to say here about the work of Robert Faurisson or his critics, of which I know very little, or about the topics they address, concerning which I have no special knowledge. Second: I will have some harsh (but merited) things to say about certain segments of the French intelligentsia, who have demonstrated that *they have not the slightest concern for fact or reason*, as I have

learned from unpleasant personal experience that I will not review here. Certainly, what I say does not apply to many others, who maintain a firm commitment to intellectual integrity. This is not the place for a detailed account. The tendencies to which I refer are, I believe, sufficiently significant to merit attention and concern, but I would not want these comments to be misunderstood as applying beyond their specific scope.

Some time ago I was asked to sign a petition in defense of Robert Faurisson's "freedom of speech and expression." The petition said absolutely nothing about the character, quality or validity of his research, but restricted itself quite explicitly to a defense of elementary rights that are taken for granted in democratic societies, calling upon university and government officials to "do everything possible to ensure the [Faurisson's] safety and the free exercise of his legal rights." I signed it without hesitation.

The fact that I had signed the petition aroused a storm of protest in France. In the Nouvel Observateur, an ex-Stalinist who has changed allegiance but not intellectual style published a grossly falsified version of the contents of the petition, amidst a stream of falsehoods that merit no comment. This, however, I have come to regard as *normal*. I was considerably more surprised to read in Esprit (September 1980) that Pierre Vidal-Naquet found the petition "scandaleuse," citing specifically the fact that I had signed it (I omit the discussion of an accompanying article by the editor that again merits no comment, at least among people who retain a commitment to elementary values of truth and honesty).

Vidal-Naquet offers exactly one reason for finding the petition, and my act of signing it, "scandaleuse": the petition, he claims, presented Faurisson's "'conclusions' comme si elles etaient effectivement des decouvertes [as if they had just been discovered]." Vidal-Naquet's statement is false. The petition simply stated that Faurisson had presented his "finding," which is *uncontroversial*, stating or implying precisely nothing

people should put such charges forth — even in private — as a sufficient basis for castigating someone as a long-time and well-known anti-Semitic. I am aware of nothing in the public record to support such charges. I will not pursue the exercise, but suppose we were to apply *similar* standards to others, asking, for example, what their attitude was towards the French war in Indochina, or to Stalinism, decades ago. Perhaps **no more need be said.**

ing. One should try to understand it. One might argue, perhaps, that Nazism and anti-Semitism are much more threatening in France. I think that this is true, but it is simply a reflection of the same factors that led to the Leninism of substantial sectors of the French intelligentsia for a long period, their contempt for elementary civil libertarian principles today, and their current fanaticism in beating the drums for crusades against the Third World. There are, in short, deep-seated totalitarian strains that emerge in various guises, a matter well worth further consideration, I believe.

Let me add a final remark about Faurisson's *alleged* "anti-Semitism." Note first that **even if Faurisson were to be a rabid anti-Semite and fanatic pro-Nazi — such charges have been presented to me in private correspondence that it would be improper to cite in detail here — this would have no bearing whatsoever on the legitimacy of the defense of his civil rights.** On the contrary, it would make it all the more imperative to defend them since, once again, it has been a truism for years, indeed centuries, that it is precisely in the case of horrendous ideas that the right of free expression must be most *vigorously* defended; it is easy enough to defend free expression for those who require no such defense. Putting this central issue aside, is it true that Faurisson is an anti-Semite or a neo-Nazi? As noted earlier, I do not know his work very well. But from what I have read — largely as a result of the nature of the attacks on him — I find *no evidence to support either conclusion.* Nor do I find credible evidence in the material that I have read concerning him, either in the public record or in private correspondence. As far as I can determine, he is a relatively apolitical liberal of some sort. In support of the charge of anti-Semitism, I have been informed that Faurisson is remembered by some schoolmates as having expressed anti-Semitic sentiments in the 1940s, and as having written a letter that some interpret as having anti-Semitic implications at the time of the Algerian war. I am a little surprised that serious

about their value and implying nothing about their validity. Perhaps Vidal-Naquet was misled by a faulty understanding of the English wording of the petition; that is, perhaps he misunderstood the English word "findings." It is, of course, obvious that if I say that someone presented his "findings" I imply nothing whatsoever about their character or validity; the statement is perfectly neutral in this respect. I assume that it was indeed a simple misunderstanding of the text that led Vidal-Naquet to write what he did, in which case he will, of course, publicly withdraw that accusation that I (among others) have done something "scandaleuse" in signing an innocuous civil rights petition of the sort that all of us sign frequently.

I do not want to discuss individuals. Suppose, then, that some person does indeed find the petition "scandaleuse," not on the basis of misreading, but because of what it actually says. Let us suppose that this person finds Faurisson's ideas *offensive*, even *horrendous*, and finds his scholarship to be a scandal. Let us suppose further that he is correct in these conclusions — whether he is or not is plainly *irrelevant* in this context. Then we must conclude that the person in question believes that the petition was "scandaleuse" because Faurisson should indeed be denied the normal rights of self-expression, should be barred from the university, should be subjected to harassment and even violence, etc. Such attitudes are *not* uncommon. They are typical, for example, of American *Communists* and no doubt their counterparts elsewhere. Among people who have learned something from the 18th century (say, Voltaire) it is a truism, hardly deserving discussion, that **the defense of the right of free expression is not restricted to ideas one approves of, and that it is precisely in the case of ideas found most offensive that these rights must be most vigorously defended.** Advocacy of the right to express ideas that are generally approved is, quite obviously, a matter of no significance. All of this is well-understood in the United

States, which is why there has been nothing [not in 1980, anyhow] like the Faurisson affair here. In France, where a civil libertarian tradition is evidently not well-established and where there have been deep totalitarian strains among the intelligentsia for many years (collaborationism, the great influence of Leninism and its offshoots, the near-lunatic character of the new intellectual right, etc.), matters are apparently quite different.

For those who are concerned with the state of French intellectual culture, the Faurisson affair is *not* without interest. Two comparisons immediately come to mind. The first is this. I have frequently signed petitions — indeed, gone to far greater lengths — on behalf of Russian dissidents whose views are absolutely horrendous: advocates of ongoing U.S. savagery in Indochina, or of policies that would lead to nuclear war, or of a religious chauvinism that is reminiscent of the dark ages. **No one has ever raised an objection.** Should someone have done so, I would regard this with the same contempt as is deserved by the behavior of those who denounce the petition in support of Faurisson's civil rights, and for exactly the same reason. I do not read the Communist Party press, but I have little doubt that the commissars and apparatchiks have carefully perused these petitions, *seeking out phrases that could be maliciously misinterpreted*, in an effort to discredit these efforts to prevent the suppression of human rights. In comparison, when I state that irrespective of his views, Faurisson's civil rights should be *guaranteed*, this is taken to be "scandaleuse" and a great fuss is made about it in France. The reason for the distinction seems obvious enough. In the case of the Russian dissidents, the state (our states) approves of supporting them, for its own reasons, which have little to do with concern for human rights, needless to say. In the case of Faurisson, however, defense of his civil rights is not officially approved doctrine — far from it — so that segments of the intelligentsia, who are ever eager to line up and march off to the beat of the drums, do not perceive any need to take the stance accepted without question in the case of Soviet dissidents. In France, there may well be other factors: perhaps a lingering guilt about disgraceful behavior of substantial sectors under Vichy, the failure to protest the French wars in Indochina, that lasting impact of Stalinism and more generally Leninist doctrines, the bizarre and dadaistic character of certain streams of intellectual life in postwar France which makes rational discourse appear to be such an odd and unintelligible pastime, the currents of anti-Semitism that have exploded into violence.

A second comparison also comes to mind. I rarely have much good to say about the mainstream intelligentsia in the United States, who generally resemble their counterparts elsewhere. Still, it is very illuminating to compare the reaction to the Faurisson affair in France and to the same phenomenon here. In the United States, Arthur Butz (whom one might regard as the American Faurisson) has not been subjected to the kind of merciless attack leveled against Faurisson. When the "no holocaust" historians hold a large international meeting in the United States, as they did some months ago, there is nothing like the hysteria that we find in France over the Faurisson affair [of course, this has changed over the decades]. When the American Nazi Party calls for a parade in the largely Jewish city of Skokie, Illinois — obviously, pure provocation — the American Civil Liberties Union defends their rights (though of course, the American Communist Party is infuriated). As far as I am aware, much the same is true in England or Australia [this, too, has changed], countries which, like the United States, have a live civil libertarian tradition. Butz and the rest are sharply criticized and condemned, but without any attack on their civil rights, to my knowledge. There is no *need*, in these countries, for an innocuous petition such as the one that is found "scandaleuse" in France, and if there were such a petition, it would surely not be attacked outside of limited and insignificant circles [...]. The comparison is, again, illuminat-