

many artists were glad to see the Arrangement go. Among other things, they complained that it supported traditional modes of painting and sculpture. By the 1980s, Tallman reports, "it had become a mark of self-respect in the serious art world to get by without [Arrangement] subsidies. . . . Rather than a safety net, the [Arrangement] was seen as an all-too-comfortable bed from which it became increasingly difficult to arise."

Tallman hastens to add that Dutch artists gladly accept other government sup-

port—commissions, direct grants, and purchases for the national collection. Indeed, public subsidies for the arts remain far more generous than they are in the United States: \$33 per capita annually, versus 71 cents. Dutch art—often criticized as boring and repetitious—may not have improved since the abolition of the Arrangement, Tallman allows, but, in what seems a dubious defense, she says that the greatest defect of the Arrangement has been remedied: Art is no longer stored away in warehouses but is exhibited for all to see.

OTHER NATIONS

The 'Higher Lights' Of France

"The Longest Run: Public Engineers and Planning in France" by Cecil O. Smith, Jr., in *American Historical Review* (June 1990), 400 A St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003.

France has not always been the bastion of benign statism and central planning that it is today, but it has for centuries harbored an institution that quietly kept such ideas alive. The Corps des Ponts et Chaussées, created during the 18th century to design a national system of highways, is an elite group of state engineers that claims as its legacy the nation's railroads and canals, as well as such modern achievements as the supersonic Concorde and France's unparalleled nuclear power system.

The Corps, writes Smith, a historian at Drexel University, is itself without parallel. It embodies "public administration in the general interest and planning on a national scale," an ideal fostered during the 17th century by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who was King Louis XIV's finance minister. Its members were dubbed *lumières supérieures* (higher lights) more than a century ago by Louis Navier, a professor of Transcendental Analysis at the nation's leading school of engineering, the École Polytechnique. As Navier's exalted title suggests, France's "national engineers" did not think of themselves as mere tinkers. "Our predecessors," one self-assured student of Navier's day wrote, "were like the English engineers of today: completely

ignorant of theory."

The Corp's distinctively French belief in the superiority of theory and logic to experience led predictably to some serious blunders. During the 1820s, on the eve of the railroad age, the Corps committed France to a costly new system of canals. And Smith wryly notes that when Navier was appointed to run the Corps' railroad operations during the 1830s, his plan of attack was based on fairly abstract reasoning: The railroad's "self-evident advantage over existing means of transportation was speed; therefore, the railroad's natural function was to carry passengers and light goods long distances at high speed." It would help unite the nation. Most freight would travel by canal barge. Following this logic, the railroads were laid out on a pattern called, after the head of the Corps, the Legrand Star, with all lines radiating from Paris. The engineers scorned considerations of short-term profits, convinced that the public good would best be served by gold-plated construction.

The Corps sneered at the helter-skelter railroad development in Germany and other countries, often carried out by private entrepreneurs who used gimcrack construction techniques. But the weak-

nesses of the French way were calamitously revealed during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when France's overly centralized system could not get troops to the front in time to stop the Prussians.

At various times during its history—notably during the revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848—the Corps and all it stood for were endangered by the brief ascendancy of politicians and ideas in the classical liberal mode of Adam Smith. Between the 1880s and World War II, these ideas did

prevail in France, but the Corps kept the *dirigiste* tradition alive. After the war, the engineers reemerged and their influence spread throughout the government and into the new para-public sector of electric power, gas, coal, banks, airlines, telecommunications, Renault, and other units that they did so much to create. True, says Smith, they continued to commit prideful blunders, but “it is no less true that for 250 years they sustained an ethos of public service rarely found elsewhere.”

China's Wishful Politics

The tragedy of Tiananmen Square, suggests MIT's Lucian W. Pye in *Asian Survey* (April 1990), is that it was so typical of Chinese politics.

The Beijing Spring of democratic hopes and the horrors of the Tiananmen Massacre brought out in bold relief the basic contradictions of Chinese political culture. The inspiring student demonstrations of April and May were a reminder of the degree to which modern Chinese politics has been carried along more by hope than by accomplishment. It is a politics of becoming, not of being. It was not just Mao Zedong but all Chinese leaders who, no matter what has happened, will say "the future is bright." Chinese leaders and intellectuals concentrate on describing how wonderful the "New China" is going to be and

how awful the past has been; thereby they avoid hardheaded analysis of the present. Students of China are equally caught up in this spirit of hope, so that wishful thinking often substitutes for critical analysis. The conventional wisdom, for example, is that a "Chinese revolution" has been going on for the last 150 years. Yet, for most of that time the country was getting nowhere and the ways of thinking of the majority of the Chinese people had not greatly changed. Were a member of the reform movement of the last days of the 19th century to return to China today, he would not experience a Rip Van Winkle effect; he could easily pick up on the current discussions of "building socialism with Chinese characteristics" and other wishful dreams about modernizing China while keeping China somehow "Chinese."

Goodbye to All That?

England is the last place on earth one would expect to find a national identity crisis, yet, like the Third World people they once ruled, write Witoszek and Sheeran, who teach at University College in Galway, the English are now asking, “What is my nation?”

The causes are various: Britain's post-war decline, the prospect of European integration, and the growing population in England of Third World immigrants who “insist on respect for and promotion of their own cultural values.” But at bottom

the authors believe that the problem is England's loss of a sense of civilizing mission in the world. As the journalist Henry Fairlie put it in 1976, “Britain is missionary or it is nothing. It is an exemplar or it is nothing.”

Unlike many other nations, which define themselves in terms of a lost past, England, Witoszek and Sheeran write, has defined itself in terms of opposition, as the embodiment of adulthood, maturity, or what they call Form, in opposition to “the Beast.” As evidence, the authors point to

“Form and the Beast: The English Mystique” by Nina Witoszek and Patrick Sheeran, in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Summer 1990), One West Range, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.