*Changes in the Training of the Power Elites in Western Europe**

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I. Introduction

Over the centuries, there have been key changes in the way the Western world has recruited its elite. The first text on this subject is probably in the Bible, where Moses' stepfather, Jethro, suggests to Moses that he should find elite people by looking for "...distinguished men, fearing God, liking truth and enemies of luxury" (Exodus, 18:21). Later on, when the first king in the Bible was to be chosen, the prophet Samuel ordered that the king should be selected by drawing lots, in a random way (Samuel I, 10:20).

Actually, for millennia, recruitment of the elite was carried out through heredity, nepotism, and violence, and the word "aristocracy" came to describe the hereditary upper class.[1] Hereditary monarchy was for centuries considered the most legitimate means of recruitment for rulers, based on the assumption that morality and intellectuality are hereditary, according to God's will.

In this paper, we present a survey of the recruitment and education of the elite. We show that there was a key shift at the turn of the nineteenth century, and a second one in the second half of the twentieth.

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[1] The first meaning of this term was in fact *rule by the best* ("aristoi" in Greek), and Aristotle stressed that a government should be in the hands of the most able members of society – the aristocrats. The term, over time, has changed meanings.

The term "elite" should first be defined. Having had various meanings at different times, the very term "elite" is often ambiguous and evades definition. As difficult as it is to pinpoint it, this paper is concerned solely with the upper or ruling elite, i.e., according to F. C. Mougel's definition, "...a relatively small group of individuals, relatively coherent sociologically, who exercise a function of power, directly or indirectly (through influence), within a society".[2] The expression "power elite" is often applied to this group.[3]

In Western countries today, the *power elite* can be roughly divided into three sub-groups that differ, yet share connections and interact with each other. First, the ruling elite, which is itself made up of two groups: the *political elite,* which includes government members, legislators, leaders of political parties, and senior civil servants, i.e., the top personnel in state bureaucracies; secondly, the *economic and business elite,* which includes business leaders such as CEOs and top executives in large firms.[4]

The third group is separate, as it does not control the levers of power, though it can have a good deal of influence upon the others, especially the political elite. It is also more diverse, as it includes top citizens in the professions, the media, the universities and the "intelligentsia".[5] This paper considers mostly the business elite and the civil servants, with an emphasis on their recruitment, education and training.

II. A short survey of the recruitment and training of elites before the twentieth century

Despite some differences between countries, there are common

[2] F.C. Mougel, *Elites et systèmes de pouvoir en Grande-Bretagne, 1945-1987,* (Bordeaux 1987), p.20.

[3] See C.W. Mills, *The Power Elite,* (New York 1956). For various concepts of elites, see also P. Zannoni, "The Concept of Elite," *European Journal of Political Research,* 6. (1970), pp.1-30; and J. Crew (ed.), *Elites in Western Democracy,* British Sociological Yearbook, (London 1974).

[4] To Marxists, these make up the real ruling class, and members of the political elite are only the lackeys of capitalism. To conservatives, they are an oppressed class, persecuted and robbed by the state's bureaucrats!

[5] A special group is made up of trade union leaders; at least in Continental Europe, as in the US and the UK, trade union leaders' influence is now negligible.

features throughout the Western world regarding the recruitment and training of the elite. In traditional European societies – of which many characteristics survived well into the nineteenth century – membership in the elite was mainly hereditary: noble birth was the basic condition. Moreover, highly born people were also generally wealthy, even though their wealth was mainly landed. In consequence, the upper elite was made up of large landowners, an *état de fait* which was normal in agrarian societies.

Nevertheless, there were some channels through which new men, or upstarts, emerged regularly as members of the elite: the favour of the sovereign or of some great lord, military prowess and exploits, amassing wealth through trade and, frequently, involvement in government finance (such as tax farming), and the purchase of public offices.[6] Such upward channels involved a degree of meritocracy; this was particularly pronounced within the Catholic Church, where some rose thanks to sheer intellectual prowess (Cardinal Mazarin, a low-born Italian who became Prime Minister of France, is a good example).

Appointments to most state positions (including the armed forces and the Church) were obtained either by patronage or by purchase.[7] Patronage was a matter of family connections, favour and intrigue. Despite appearing shocking today, such appointments allowed some bright young people to rise early to high office, such as the Younger Pitt, who became Prime Minister of Britain at the age of twenty four. The Industrial and the French Revolutions, economic growth, and the spread of representative, parliamentary, and eventually democratic systems of government brought about a number of changes, but more gradually than one might expect.

In this paper we focus on the bureaucratic and business elites. However, a brief mention of the political elite is necessary. This came to be "recruited" mainly by election. Yet, for a long time, big landowners and members of the upper middle class had an overwhelming majority

[6] Such ascendancy was generally crowned by ennoblement, as a result of which descendants of the "new men" were - after a time - fully integrated into the elite.

[7] Including officers' commissions in armies, a system which Britain was the last to abolish in 1871.

in parliaments and cabinets, even though some prominent businessmen entered the political elite. This was especially the case in nineteenth century Britain, but only somewhat less marked in France despite its revolutions. Only in the late nineteenth century did members of the *nouvelles couches* (the medium or even lower middle class) enter the French Parliament. At the same time, the rise of socialist parties did bring into parliaments (even the German *Reichstag*) – but not into power – some members of the working class. As for the training of nineteenth century politicians, it was similar to that of the other elites and of the upper class as a whole.

Indeed, for a long time, there was no specific education for the elite and most sons of the nobility had private tutors. From the seventeenth century onwards, many of them - as well as many sons of the well-to-do bourgeois - were sent to "high schools", such as the English public schools, or, in Catholic countries, to colleges run by the Jesuits or the Oratorians. In these schools, the pupils received a purely classical education. Then a number of young men attended universities, but the latter only offered professional training for those who wanted to become clerics, lawyers, or doctors. For well-born young men, universities such as Oxford and Cambridge were merely finishing schools where they had a good time and made useful connections (what we now call "networking"). It is noteworthy, however, that in France, under the Third Republic, many politicians were lawyers, and that Parliament also included a sizeable number of doctors, as well as some teachers.

Changes in the recruitment and training of elites first took place in the late eighteenth century, arising from the needs of modern states, which were getting stronger and tried to become more efficient, particularly by adopting new technologies. States increasingly needed not only trained specialists and military officers, but also engineers, whom traditional schools and universities did not generally produce. As defence and war were the major function of states in the eighteenth century, and the "art of war" was becoming more sophisticated, the earliest move was the establishment, by many Europeans states, of schools for training officers. At first, it was for the so-called *armes savantes* (i.e., artillery and military engineering in which some scientific knowledge was necessary),

but later schools were also established for infantry, cavalry and the navy.[8] Military schools and colleges have not only survived to our own days, but they have been imitated in various other institutions, and are the origin of the French *grandes écoles.*

Then, in the late nineteenth century, in Europe as well as in the USA, two major economic changes had a big impact. First the "Second Industrial Revolution", i.e., the rise of new industries, like chemicals and electricity, which were science based. Second, the "managerial revolution",[9] which involved the rise of the "corporate economy" and of the Chandlerian managerial enterprise, where salaried senior management largely took over from capital owners and heirs of the founding families. Both engineers and managers needed specialized formal training, while the pioneers of industrialisation and their heirs only had on-the-job training, i.e., learning by doing.

So there was a clear difference between the education of the leaders of the First and of the Second Industrial Revolutions.[10] On the whole, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw major changes in the education of the elite, and institutions were reformed or created to provide such training. In most countries, the old "medieval" universities were reformed and expanded during the nineteenth century, and many new ones were established. Moreover, another change which occurred during the nineteenth century "age of Reform" is that most Western countries reformed their civil service to which entrance by competitive exams became the norm.

After the inception of these changes in the pre-1914 era, the troubled inter-war period was not marked by any important development. The scene shifted again only after World War II. In all countries, there was a desire on the part of politicians to "democratise" the elite, and there were significant reforms in the way the elite was recruited, as well as in its education.

[8] The earliest ones were founded in Russia under Peter the Great. Austria and France followed, and Britain (Sandhurst, 1799) and the US (West Point, 1802) were no exception.
[9] From the title of a forgotten book by J. Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World*, (New York 1941).
[10] H. Kaelble, "L'évolution du recrutement du patronat en Allemagne comparée à celle des Etats-Unis et de la Grande-Bretagne depuis la Révolution Industrielle", in M. Lévy-Leboyer (ed.), *Le patronat de la seconde industrialisation*, (Paris 1979), p.29.

At the same time that a "democratization" of higher education was taking place, giving rise to an enormous increase in the number of university students, there was a concurrent emergence of two channels of education: one for the elite and the other for the rest. Democratization did not mean meritocracy and opportunity for all. Despite this overall approach, each country achieved it in its own particular way and this will be analyzed in the subsequent sections in more detail for three countries of the Western world.

III. Britain

In the nineteenth century, British business leaders, most of whom had not had any higher education, were wary of university graduates.[11] This diffidence was reflected in the cult of the "practical man" who had been trained on the job from the age of 14, either as an engineer on the factory / workshop floor, or as a manager in the counting-house.[12] Therefore, most of the British economic elite was recruited and trained via the traditional channels of family connections and patronage, and eventually via the so-called "old boys' networks" of those who had attended public schools.

In some respects this system survived into the twentieth century. A high, though decreasing, percentage of top British executives began their careers at the end of their secondary education; they were either "heirs", i.e., members of the family which owned the firm and sons of other "good families", who at once received a top job, or men from a more modest background, who had risen within a firm. However, it became increasingly frequent for upper- and upper-middle class young men to attend university before entering business. In consequence, the percentage of university-educated British executives was lower than in France and Germany, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, but increased over time (see Table 1). From the inter-war period, large

[11] Actually, for a long time, neither the universities nor the many scientific institutions of Britain bothered with vocational training.

[12] See W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain, 1750-1990*, (London 1993), Tables 3.4 and 3.5. He has shown that before the end of the nineteenth century, only a small minority of industrialists and sons of industrialists attended public schools.

firms increased their intake of university graduates, many of them from the older universities, especially Cambridge, which had developed the teaching of science and even engineering.

From the late nineteenth century, new or "red brick" universities had also been established in provincial cities; they emphasized science and technology and also had schools of commerce.[13] However, the percentage of business leaders who had graduated from universities other than Oxbridge was low for a long time. It then rose, but it is still lower than that from Oxbridge. So the majority of British business leaders who have attended university attended Oxford or Cambridge.

Moreover, a large majority of those leaders – especially in the City, but somewhat less in industry and commerce – had attended public schools before entering university; indeed education at a major public school was more important in terms of social prestige than a university degree. And on the whole, for a long time, general rather than specific education was favoured at the highest level (see Table 2). For instance, in 1907, the percentage of business leaders who had studied humanities was almost three times higher than in France and six times higher than in Germany. Management and business studies were almost completely missing from executives' training.

However, after World War II, this lack was compensated for by training provided by professional bodies like the Institute of Chartered

TABLE 1: Educational level of business leaders.
(percent)

	1907			1953			1972			1989		
Education	**GB**	**Fr.**	**G.**	**GB**	**Fr.**	**G.**	**GB**	**Fr.**	**G.**	**GB**	**Fr.**	**G.**
Apprenticeship	18	7	31	11	0	11	3	0	12	0	0	10
Sec. School	47	21	7	33	2	11	28	4	2	17	3	0
Training college	0	0	5	12	2	3	10	6	4	19	2	2
univers./gr. écoles	35	72	57	45	96	75	59	90	82	64	95	88

Notes: GB is for Great Britain, Fr. for France and G. for Germany; Sec. is secondary school.
Source: Y. Cassis, *Big Business. The European Experience in the twentieth Century*, (Oxford 1997), p.133.

[13] See F. Crouzet, "Ecoles, universités et développement économique", in M. Merger and D. Barjot (eds.), *Les entreprises et leurs réseaux: hommes, capitaux et pouvoirs, 19-20 siècles*, (Paris 1998).

Accountants, technical colleges and engineering schools that did not yet have university status, but offered quality education.[14] More recently, a number of American type business schools have been established, the most recent ones being – *horribile dictu* for old-fashioned dons – at Oxford and Cambridge.

So, in the past few decades, a business-oriented type of education has been more common among British businessmen, though only slightly less than a third of the business leaders of 1989 had received commercial training in British (or American) business schools or as accountants (who make up an increasing percentage at the top levels of large corporations).

As for the ruling elites, recruitment for the British civil service was reformed during the nineteenth century. Recruitment and promotion through patronage gave way gradually to entry by competitive exams and promotion by merit. The Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 was the main instrument of reform, though its proposals were implemented piecemeal. It is worth mentioning that the exams were of a literary type, on subjects studied at universities, introducing a strong bias in favour of individuals from the traditional upper classes, and consequently filling up government agencies with generalist, amateur gentlemen. Graduates

TABLE 2: Fields of Higher education of business leaders.
(percent)

	1907			1953			1972			1989		
	GB	Fr.	G.	GB	Fr.	G.	GB	Fr.	G.	GB	Fr.	G.
Dual training	0	0	4	0	8	0	3	4	2	6	11	6
Arts	26	10	4	8	3	0	3	0	0	10	2	0
Economics	0	5	0	11	3	9	19	4	10	27	15	31
Law, Politics	30	14	38	11	18	39	17	35	44	10	22	32
Science, Engin.	9	71	50	19	62	48	19	57	37	20	50	25
Others	35	0	4	51	6	4	39	0	7	27	0	6

Notes: Dual training includes polyvalent training in arts, economics, or law and science and engineering.
Source: Y. Cassis, *op. cit.* (1997), p.135.

[14] See G. Copeman, *Leaders of British Industry*, (London 1955); and P. Stanworth and A. Giddens (eds.), *Elites and Power in British Society*, (London 1974).

from Oxford and Cambridge, and especially those who had also attended top public (i.e., private) schools, had built-in advantages at the start of their careers, particularly if they took the competitive exam for entrance into the higher levels of the civil service.

In the twentieth century, the Higher Civil Service (HCS) was quite small: 1022 "secretaries" and "assistant secretaries" in 1953. It used to be recruited from the "administrative class" of the Civil Service, two thirds of which had been selected by competitive exams, and one third by promotion from the lower "clerical" class. In 1968, a reform was adopted, but it did not bring about significant changes and even restricted internal promotion. Exam contents continued to be of a general nature (all rounders are wanted) and to favour candidates with a public school and Oxbridge background; and a large majority of successful candidates are arts graduates.[15] Actually the recruiting of HCS members has become still more elitist since World War II, with an increasing percentage of them having attended public schools and Oxbridge; the Foreign Service is the most elitist sector of the Civil Service. Some experts have concluded that the British system is not so different from the French system.[16]

Switching from the civil service into business, coined the "revolving door" or *pantouflage*, is not as common in Britain as it is in France, as we will show below. Indeed, in Britain, only 5% of the leaders of the 200 largest companies come from the civil service. Some are former ambassadors, recruited after retiring at 60 from the Foreign Service. The other 95% are roughly divided equally between members of founders' families and those who have risen in the business world, generally "imported" from another firm.

IV. France

The most original character of the French system for recruiting and training elites is the role played by elite institutions – the *Grandes Ecoles* (GE). Moreover, in recent decades a super GE, the National School for

[15] The 1968 reforms included the creation of a Civil Service College, where new entrants would get professional training, but teaching at this college is not specialized.
[16] See R.H. Kelsall, *Higher Civil Servants in Britain*, (London 1955); F.C. Mougel *op. cit.* (1987); and M. Charlot, *L'énarchie à l'anglaise*, (Paris 1989).

Administration (*Ecole Nationale d'Administration*), best known by its abbreviation of ENA, has emerged as the instrument for selecting not only top civil servants (as was its original goal), but most of the French power elites.

The Grandes Ecoles (GE)

The origins of the GE go back to the eighteenth century military schools (Napoleon Bonaparte was one of their alumni), and to the parallel creation of special schools to train engineers needed by the state: the *Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées* (for civil road engineers) was established in 1715, and the *Ecole des Mines* (for mining engineers) in 1783. During the French Revolution, the need for more civil and military engineers was felt. In 1794, the *Ecole Centrale des Travaux Publics* was established; its name was changed to *Ecole Polytechnique* in 1795 and it was militarised in 1804.[17] Actually for well over a century most *Polytechnique* graduates became artillery or *génie* officers, but those who did best at the final exam became government engineers, specialized in public works, mining, powder-making etc.. Over time, an increasing number of officers entered industry after resigning their commissions or retiring.

During the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, a large number of other GE, mainly for training engineers, were gradually established, either by the state or by private initiative, such as the *Ecole Centrale* in 1829, a school to which a significant number of French industrialists sent their sons after 1840.[18] The Second Industrial Revolution brought about the founding of new schools, which were more specialized than the old ones, in new fields like electricity and aeronautics. Schools of commerce were also founded, particularly the HEC (*Hautes Etudes Commerciales*) in 1881, which can be described as the first French business school.

This proliferation resulted partly from deficiencies in the French university system.[19] The old universities had been destroyed by the

[17] Two other schools worth mentioning were created during the same period: The *Ecole Spéciale Militaire* (generally known as *St-Cyr* from the place where it was sited) was established for infantry and cavalry officers in 1802. It replaced the Old Regime's military schools. In 1795, a civilian school for training high school teachers, the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS) was founded in Paris.

[18] *Ecole Centrale des Arts et Manufactures* is the full name; it was a private college.

Revolution; new ones (or rather a number of faculties) were created under Napoleon, but only the law and medicine faculties played a role in training elites during the nineteenth century. Arts faculties only produced high school teachers and sciences faculties only developed significantly in the late nineteenth century, when specialized institutes (for instance, for electricity and chemistry) were added to them, but they were not a channel for recruiting business elites.

According to recent statistics, France presently has 302 engineering schools with 59,000 students and 226 commerce or business schools with 64,000 students. These figures may be compared with the million and a half students in universities which have no entry exam and admit anyone who has graduated from high school (*baccalauréat*). On the contrary, entry in any GE is by competitive exam (*concours*), with only a fixed number of candidates being accepted every year.[20]

Moreover, students do not sit for the *concours* immediately after high school; they first go to specialized schools (*classes préparatoires* – not to be confused with English prep-schools!) where they are only accepted if they have good grades in high school or the *baccalauréat*. They study intensively at the *classes préparatoires* for one to four years, after which they take the entrance exam to one or several of the *grandes écoles*. It is clear that this system is highly selective and elitist. Moreover, it is hierarchized and there is a wide gap in prestige and also in job opportunities for graduates between top level GEs – Polytechnique, Centrale, HEC, ENS, and provincial commerce schools.[21] So out of the half a million people who pass the baccalaureat each year, 37,000 will

[19] Although Polytechnique and other GEs were imitated abroad, France was the only country where they played a very large role in the recruitment and training of elites.

[20] In all these schools, the number of entrants was (and is) not large: the students admitted per year in the five biggest engineering schools were 320 in 1860; 440 during 1872-91; 520 in 1919 and 1176 during 1919-1932. See M. Lévy-Leboyer (ed.), *Le patronat de la seconde industrialisation*, (Paris 1979), p.152.

[21] There is a hierarchy among GEs. The top level schools are usually in Paris. There is also a hierarchy among *classes préparatoires* for the main GEs. Actually those which are located in three or four big high schools on the Paris left bank supply a large majority of students who pass the exam for the top GEs. The fate of students who fail the *concours* is to enter university, where they do well thanks to their intensive work in a *classe préparatoire*. Moreover, groups of engineering schools have a common exam, and candidates who do not do well enough to be accepted at a top GE can enter a less prestigious one.

be accepted in *classes préparatoires* among whom 25,000 will eventually enter a GE (including second and third ranking schools).

Over time, the GEs have become increasingly important in the recruitment of the French business elite. Table 3 shows this trend during the twentieth century. In 1912 and 1973 over 50% of a sample among the leaders of French industry had graduated from engineering schools, and the percentage had reached 70% in 1939. According to M. Lévy-Leboyer, in a cohort of business leaders over the period 1912-79, 29% of them had graduated from *Polytechnique*.[22]

Comparing France to England and Germany, it appears that French business executives have consistently received the highest level of education (see Table 1). It was higher as early as 1907 and remained so. Whether French executives were better prepared for their profession is a matter for debate, but it seems that they received an education more suited to business than did the British elite (see Table 2). French education placed a stronger emphasis on science, though possibly in a way which was too abstract.

However, Table 3 also shows a decline after World War II in the share of engineering schools' graduates and a rise in the benefit of people who had studied at other institutions: law faculties, political science institutes (IEPs), business schools, which had earlier been negligible, and the ENA.[23] This brings us to the most significant development of the late twentieth century in the recruitment of the French power elite.

TABLE 3: Education of a sample of 90 leaders of the business elite per year *(percent)*

	1912	1939	1973
Law, Political Science	21	23	46
Engineering school	54	71	51
Only primary and high school	25	7	3

Source: M. Lévy-Leboyer, *op. cit.* (1979), Table 5, p.152.

[22] M. Lévy-Leboyer, *op.cit.* (1979), Table 6, pp. 160-1.
[23] Lately quite a few business leaders have also attended American business schools.

The Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA)

While schools for training engineers had mushroomed, no *grande école* had been established for the French civil service, and especially for recruiting members of its elite – the *Grands Corps*.[24] The *Grands Corps* is a typical French institution which goes back to the Old Regime, was abolished during the French Revolution and was revived by Napoleon. It is composed, in particular, of the Council of State, Inspectorate of Finances, the Audit Office and the Foreign Service; in other words, it is the top civil service. Before World War II, there was a separate competitive exam for each of the *Corps*, with few candidates and still fewer places every year. Candidates had generally a law or an arts degree (or both), and they had often taken courses in political science at the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques* (Sciences-Po), a private college.[25]

However, at the end of World War II, General De Gaulle and the leaders of the Resistance considered that the traditional bureaucrats had failed in their duties in the 1930s, as well as under the Vichy regime, and that there was a need to change the recruitment and training of civil servants. It was therefore decided to create the ENA (planned by Michel Debré, who later became de Gaulle's Prime Minister) which would recruit top civil servants, and have three major goals.

The first goal was social openness and diversification of intellectual origins. Recruitment would be meritocratic, and only the best would be selected. They would come from *all* classes, not only the Parisian bourgeoisie, in contrast to the previous system for recruiting members of the *Grands Corps*, which was restrictive from a social point of view, and was condemned for being partial to young men (no women then!) from an upper-class background.[26] The second aim was to rapidly develop a new elite that would be chosen for their talent rather than their links with the elite in power. The third aim was to foster better

[24] There had been an aborted attempt under the Second Republic in 1848.

[25] This college had been founded after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, by conservative politicians, bankers and intellectuals, with the specific aim to educate individuals who would become elite members.

[26] Candidates for the Foreign Service were invited for tea in a drawing room and their social amenities in these surroundings were one of the criteria for success or failure at exam!

coordination between the different administrations, via contacts made at school.

The idea of selecting and training elites through special schools was not new in France; nonetheless the ENA has two major specificities, which make it a "super-*grande école*".[27] First it has a quasi-monopoly of selecting the bureaucratic "ruling elite",[28] while none of the other GEs has such a privilege. Secondly its role is of selecting rather than training top civil servants and the selection is drastic: students have to overcome two hurdles – an entry exam and a final exam, and the last one is decisive. The administration in which an alumnus (*énarque*) begins his employment, from the most prestigious (the *Grands Corps*) to the least attractive (Ministries of Education, Social Security Administration or Agriculture) depends on his marks in the final competitive exam at the end of the second and last year.

As for the entrance exam, the early design to democratise recruitment was embodied in the creation of two separate entrance exams. One is for "students" i.e., graduates coming directly from university (generally from law and social sciences) or from an IEP (*Institut d'études politiques*). The most important IEP which is situated in Paris is *Sciences-Po* – the successor of the old *Ecole Libre*, which was nationalized after World War II and has gradually developed. It is half GE, as entrance is by exam, but also half university, having many more students than any GE. The quality of teaching is high and *Sciences-Po* is really the main channel towards ENA. But, after graduating, would-be candidates spend a year or two in special classes, where they are coached for the ENA exam and which are the equivalent of the *classes préparatoires* for the other GEs. As for the written exam, it is largely a matter of broad general culture, though the writing of some papers on subjects like economics or international relations is requested. At the orals, the ability to speak brilliantly about a subject one knows nothing about is crucial!

The second exam is reserved to candidates who have spent some

[27] One can add that its students are older than those of the other GEs since, before entering, they have usually studied either at *Sciences-Po* or at another GE, as the ENS or *Polytechnique*.

[28] However, governments have the right to appoint directly a limited number of top bureaucrats who are not ENA alumni.

years (at least five) in the lower ranks of the civil service; but they must have a university degree, and generally they have been coached for one year in special classes (like the candidates for the first exam). This exam is separate but not very different from the first; it was intended to afford an opportunity for those with a more modest background than alumni from *Sciences-Po* to enter the ENA. As a matter of fact, and generally speaking, persons who entered the ENA through the bureaucrats' exam were less successful in their later careers than the ones taking the students' exam, because they did not do as well in the final comprehensive exam (which is the same for all students).[29]

When comparing the recruitment of ENA with other *grandes écoles*, the ENA recruits approximately 100 students each year, while *Polytechnique* recruits almost 500.[30] Although other *grandes écoles* have a specific technical curriculum, the ENA focuses more on recruiting than on training the elite. ENA students spend their first year working as interns in some public administrative agency (a regional administration or an embassy, for example). They then return to school for the second year, where the emphasis is again on the humanities plus some training in the social sciences (though in recent years the teaching at ENA has been mildly "technicized").[31] An essential aspect of attending ENA is networking: alumni will have acquaintances in all spheres of the civil service and politics.

ENA über alles

A crucial development in French history, during the fifty years after the establishment of the ENA, is its success in almost monopolizing the recruitment of the rulers of France, and not only in the civil service. Actually, there has been a gradual change in the ENA's role in two ways.

[29] Presently 60 percent of entrants are "students," and 40 percent "civil servants."

[30] The first *promotion*, in 1946, had 90 members; in 1995, 108 students were admitted. In the intervening years, enrolment was smaller in some years. While ENA recruitment in the 1950s was mostly of students with rightist opinions, nowadays the ENA includes both rightists and leftists, with a possible leftist majority. See J-M. Gaillard, *L'ENA, Miroir de L'Etat*, (Bruxelles 1995).

[31] It is commonly remarked that the internship during the first year is very useful, while students do not learn much during their second year at the school itself.

First, a non-negligible number of its graduates left the civil service to go into politics, some of them rising to the top (e.g., Presidents Giscard d'Estaing and Chirac, Prime Ministers Laurent Fabius, Michel Rocard, Alain Juppé and Lionel Jospin). ENA graduates have participated in governments of all political leanings, as ministers, and as members of ministers' staffs (*cabinets*). In 1994-1995, 11 *énarques* were ministers, 11 were on the personal staff of the French President and 75 in the office of the Prime Minister. From 1980, around 60 percent of the directors of *cabinet* (actually vice-ministers), and 35 percent of ministers have come from the ENA; and many *énarques* have sat in Parliament.[32]

Second, a number of alumni have become business leaders in both the public (state owned or nationalized) and the private sectors.[33] Forty-seven percent of the heads of the 200 largest French companies in 1993 came from the civil service (and from its "annexes" e.g., *cabinets* and Parliament), compared to 41 percent in 1985.

TABLE 4: Origins of the Leaders of French CAC 40 Companies *(percent)*

	1981	1991	1997
Members of owners' families	43	23	20
Members of the *Grands Corps*	32	38	44
Civil servants who do not belong to the *Grands Corps*	5	11	11
Persons with a business background	20	28	25

Source: N. Baverez, *op. cit.*, note 34, pp. 30-31.

[32] This was helped by the special privilege which French civil servants enjoy: they can get a leave of absence to go into politics and go back to their previous job if they are defeated.

[33] There are two ways for civil servants to enter the business sector. The first is the so-called "revolving door" or "pantouflage" i.e., directly from the civil service into business. However, a cooling off period exists obliging civil servants to "sit on the side" for five years before being allowed to enter the regulated sector; but they can enter a different private sector. See E.S. Brezis and A. Weiss, "Conscientious Regulation and Post-Regulatory Employment Restrictions", *European Journal of Political Economy*, 13. (1997), pp. 517-36. The second is indirect: after having spent some time either as a member of parliament or on the personal staff of a minister, a former civil servant can be appointed by the government to direct a state-owned firm or be "imported" by a large private company (which has appreciated their talent) to which his connections in politics and in the bureaucracy can be useful.

An important study considers the origins of the leaders (CEOs, chairmen, directors) of the companies which have their shares quoted on the Paris stock exchange used for compiling the *CAC 40*.[34] The main results are shown in Table 4.

This table is striking; it shows the take-over of large French companies by the "state nobility" (a well-coined expression, which alludes to the privileges enjoyed by those members from the *Grands Corps*, almost all graduates of the ENA).[35] It also emphasizes how much their stranglehold has strengthened during the last two decades; the share of civil servants rose from 37 percent in 1981 to 55 percent in 1997. This has happened to the prejudice of business dynasties (though they remain present on the French business scene)[36], and also of graduates from traditional GEs.[37]

As for the democratization of recruitment, after World War II, the first few *promotions* were open to all classes and open to reform. Ten years later, however, it was apparent that the recruitment was sociologically and geographically narrow. The proportion of students in the ENA whose parents belonged to the *Grands Corps* was 44% in 1944, and rose to 63% in 1980.[38] By the 1970s, a self-recruitment of the ruling class was obvious: 8% of the population supplies 63% of the ENA students – the next generation of rulers.

Altogether, France has a system which is drastically selective, highly elitist and in which the selection becomes even more severe over time. Moreover, the number of GE students is very low compared to the total number of students in universities and is stable, while the number of

[34] See N. Baverez, "Etrange capitalisme à la française", *Sociétal*, March (1998), pp. 30-31. The CAC 40 includes the shares of the 40 most important firms in France, the French Dow-Jones.

[35] It was coined by the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It alluded to the Old Regime nobility, which was divided into *noblesse d'épée* (of military origin) and *noblesse de robe* (top judges).

[36] Their members – and also founders of firms – have generally degrees but from law schools or provincial business schools and not from top GEs.

[37] This take-over has been helped by the double and inverse process of large-scale nationalization by the Socialist governments after their election in 1981, and of privatisation by right-wing governments in 1986-1988 and 1995-1997.

[38] See J.M. Gaillard, *op. cit.* (1995), pp. 105-108.
However, each graduating class includes a few graduates from modest backgrounds, some of whom go on to brilliant careers.

students in universities has increased each year (up to a recent date). There is, however, a compensation: access to universities is open to any person who has obtained the *baccalauréat,* since tuition is practically free.

V. Germany

The basic fact about Germany as regards the recruitment of elites is that it had in the nineteenth century many good universities, which were far ahead in research and in training top scientists and engineers. The changes in technical training that occurred both in Britain and France in the late nineteenth century were actually stimulated by competition from Germany and its example.

German universities were not very hierarchised so that the country had nothing like Oxbridge and had no need for special *grandes écoles.* Elite recruitment has therefore been less selective than in Britain or France. However, as early as the nineteenth century, top civil servants and many business leaders had attended universities. The recruitment of the bureaucratic elite was, and still is, carried out by competitive exams among persons who had university degrees, generally in law.[39] Regarding the training of the business elite, the German percentage of university-educated executives was (and still is) lower than in France, but much higher than in the UK, and it has even increased. Their education was primarily in law or engineering (see Table 2). But in the last decades, the percentage of graduates in science and technology has decreased (from 50% in 1907 to 25% in the 1990s), and is now much lower than in France. The share of law graduates has slightly decreased and that of economics graduates has markedly risen.

Regarding the recruitment of the business elite, two thirds of the 200 top business leaders of Germany come from the business world, half of whom rose within the firm they head, and one quarter from owners' families.[40] The role played by on-the-job training through an

[39] In the nineteenth century, most top civil servants belonged to the nobility.

[40] See M. Bauer and B. H. Bertin-Mourot, *Vers un modèle Européen de dirigeants?,* (Paris 1996). As in other countries, salaried professionals managers are better educated than heirs of founder's families.

apprenticeship is striking, since Germany, when compared to France and the UK, is the only country to still have 10% of its elite rising through this channel (see Table 1). Moreover, some large companies have their "corporate universities", i.e., training centres for managers.

A German specificity was the *technische hochschule* (technical colleges), which were first established in the 1860s and gained university status by 1900; they have produced large numbers of well-trained engineers, whose education included practical experience. However, few of their graduates became business leaders. Germany also had early high-level teaching in business management and accounting, particularly in specialized colleges, the *handelshochschulen*, which from 1898 on were awarded university status. But few top business leaders prior to the 1980s had graduated from these colleges. Business degrees in Germany are quite different from MBAs; they are based on economic theory rather than case studies, and the American model of business schools has not taken root in Germany (or is just penetrating there).

Elite recruitment is thus less "aristocratic" than in Britain and France, since there are no elite universities or elite schools. But we should mention that job hunting graduates get help from the corporations (students unions) or rather from former members of the latter, so that some speak of corporation nepotism and some self-recruitment of the elite.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has laid out an overview on the education and training of elites. The recruitment and training of the elite in the Western world has seen two main changes. Firstly, in the nineteenth century, the business elite started to become educated. Instead of receiving their training on the production floor, they began attending universities or engineering schools.

This change was not rapid, and it was stronger in France and Germany than in England. Some have viewed this difference as a kind of Gerschenkronian development claiming that, in backward countries, the state must make a special effort to establish and develop the teaching of

science and technology, an effort which is unnecessary in more advanced countries.

This evolution can be mainly explained by the change in the ownership of business and the development of technology. The business elite before the nineteenth century was mainly made up of heirs, and not only did training in universities seem necessary: families were afraid that it could corrupt their heirs. They were therefore trained inside the firm. But when ownership and management increasingly became separated, the business elites were recruited via their education, which became mandatory.

Another reason for the increase in education is the importance of technology in the development of firms. Some of the engineers entering firms climbed the ladders to the top ranks of management. So it became almost impossible to succeed entering the elite without education. Even heirs could not manage the firm without education.

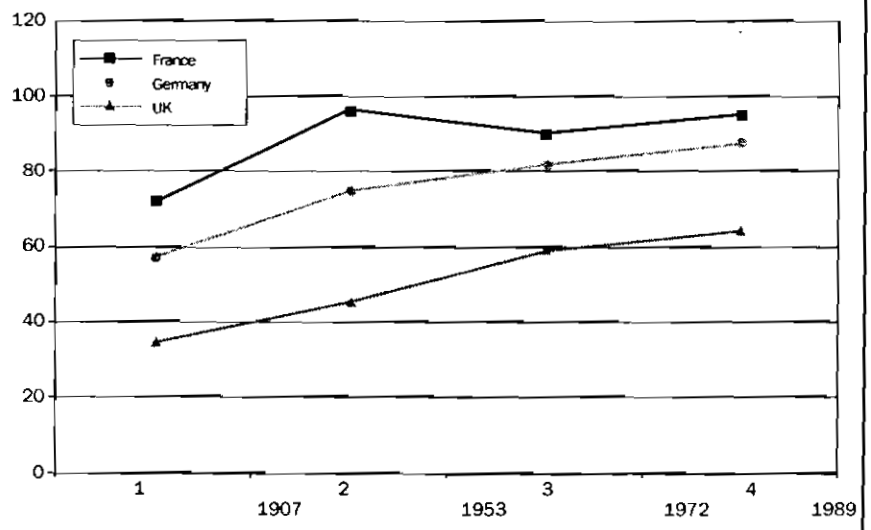
Secondly, there were major changes in recruitment after World War II. At that time, the elite started to be mainly recruited through elite schools that selected their students by meritocratic exams. The idea of meritocracy made inroads, and new blood entered Oxbridge in the UK, the *grandes écoles* and the ENA in France, and elite universities in the US (as we show in the appendix). Consequently, the first post-change elite was recruited in a diverse way by successful performance in exams. For the first generation after these changes in recruitment, elite schools not only chose the best, but also provided an opportunity for some who did not belong to the elite milieu to enter the best schools.

In succeeding generations, however, exams have not provided opportunities for everyone. In the second post-change generation, the children of the elite have entered elite schools in greater proportions due to a cultural bias. In other words, whenever a new system is introduced, the nascent class system is destroyed, yielding to a fluid, mobile society. However, from the second post-change generation on, the children of the elite again have an advantage. Meritocratic choice is, therefore, not equivalent to equal opportunity, and has actually led to a self-recruitment of elites, resulting in a stratification effect.

We have shown that elite recruitment systems do not differ much throughout the various countries of the Western world. Indeed, over the years, the ways the Western world recruits and educates its elites have converged; with the exception of Germany, they are recruited through elite schools and from elite families. It is therefore not surprising to observe a convergence in the percent of business elites members who have university or equivalent degrees, and it is likely that they will converge 100% over time (see figure1). However, differences remain between countries, which can be explained by different traditions. In countries where firms were usually not family-owned, but rather state-owned, or financed by shares and run by CEOs, recruits will have gone through more training than in countries where most firms are family-owned enterprises. This explains why relatively the UK has less education.

So, education is the ticket to entering in the business elite of people whose parents did not own a business (this increase in education is not only true for elites, it is a trend in the whole population). However, in

FIGURE 1: University Education of Elites *(percent)*



Source: see text, Table 1.

the UK and France, the path to elite positions has required attendance at an exclusive school or university. It is mostly students belonging to highly educated families who enter those schools. In Germany, the path to the business elite is different. It still has many people without a higher education, and there are no comparable elite establishments; all universities have roughly the same status.

It is clear that education has become a "must" for belonging to the business elite. However, less clear is the type of training that makes its members the most efficient. Until recently, the education and training of bureaucrats and businessmen was not very relevant to their future career, except for those who had a law degree or attended an engineering school. The most important was to be an alumnus of a French *grande école,* of an English public school or of Oxbridge. This imbued a strong feeling of belonging to the elite and laid the foundations for vast networks of relationships.

However, over the twentieth century, the type of training became more important. We have shown in this paper that in the three countries examined, the type of specialization was different. In England, it is not clear which ticket opens the best door for success. Business leaders come from economics, law, sciences or arts. In France engineering has been very clearly the necessary educational background, while in Germany it has been either law or sciences and engineering.

Despite these differences, we see a clear convergence, although it may take time until all countries become similar in the training of their elites (see figure 2). We suggest that globalization affects the training of the elites, and that differences will be alleviated over time. This paper has focused on three countries only. It would, of course, be interesting to see if the curricula vitae of the elites in other countries are similar to those of the countries examined.

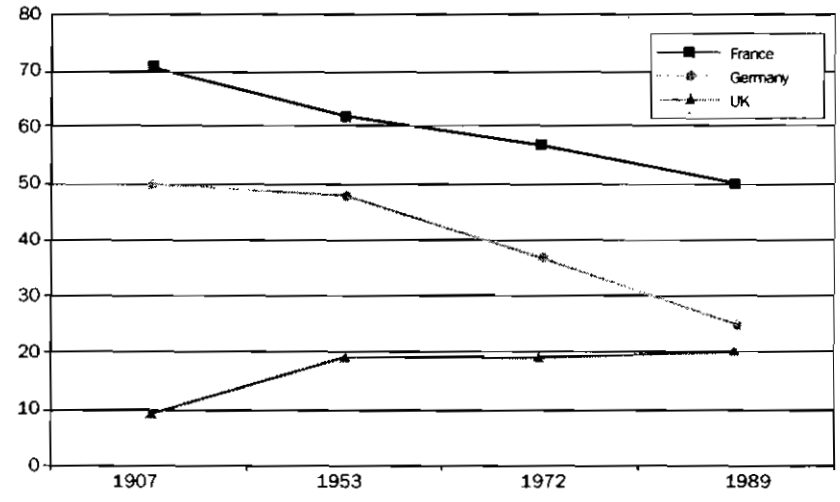
Regarding civil servants, differences between countries are wider. From the time of the French Revolution and Napoleon, France has had a tradition of intervention that may explain why it is the only country to have a specific school for the recruitment and training of its elite – the ENA. No other country in Europe or America has a unique school that has a monopoly for recruiting all top civil servants, i.e., the

bureaucratic elite. Moreover, in no other Western country have so many top business managers come from the civil service, and in no other advanced country have graduates of a single institution secured such a stranglehold over the recruitment of the bureaucratic, political, and economic elite.

In conclusion, the policies which were adopted after World War II to widen the recruitment of elites were at first a success, but over time there has been a perverse stratification effect and the circulation of elites has receded, with obvious consequences for the economy. This stratification effect is not optimal for economic growth, especially in periods of rapid technological change; it leads to lower rates of growth. The poor performance of the French economy in the last twenty years could exemplify this conclusion, but the present dismal situation of Germany – which has a more open system – refuses it! A thorough study of this problem is needed.[11]

This does not mean, however, that *grandes écoles*, British public

FIGURE 2: Business Elites Trained in Engineering *(percent)*



Source: see text, Table 2.

[11] See E.S. Brezis and F. Crouzet "Meritocracy and Growth", mimeo, (Jerusalem, 2003).

schools, Ivy League colleges, and other elitist institutions ought to be abolished, as some might conclude. This paper shows that it is necessary to reduce the cultural bias among the classes, which has been widened. Actually, the "education crisis," which has affected all Western countries, may have played a major role in this bias, thus resulting in restricted upward social mobility.[42]

[42] Indeed, primary and secondary education, especially in public or state schools, is undergoing a crisis in all Western countries, perhaps due to ill-conceived reforms, the breakdown of discipline, and the low quality of many teachers. See P. Temin, "Teacher Quality and American Economic Growth", mimeo, (MIT 2002).
This gradually restricts opportunities for bright young people from modest backgrounds to excel in their studies, win scholarships, and attend university. In France today, only children from the middle class, or even upper middle class families can obtain a good high school education. A career like that of the late President Pompidou, son of a village schoolmaster, would be presently impossible.

APPENDIX
Some Remarks on the US

A comparison between the three European countries and the US would be most interesting, especially because the American education system is considered to be more open and to be based upon more equal opportunity than that of "Old Europe". However, this would be an immense task, and only a few remarks will be made here, as a complement to the article.

• From the 1890s, large American companies started to hire people who had received an academic education, and as in Europe, this development accelerated after World War II.

• A major difference, however, is that admission to higher education in colleges became based from the 1950s on the SAT (Scholarly Aptitude Test), a sort of IQ test (administered by the ETS – Educational Testing Service, a privately non-profit organization). College applicants take the SAT, and those who get the highest scores are admitted by the top universities and colleges; the relative number of such "favourites of fortune" is higher than, say, the successful candidates at the French *grandes écoles*. So there is a contrast between the American *aptitude* tests and the European *achievement* tests.

• In fact, SAT scores are correlated with family education and wealth. The dream that America would become a classless society thanks to aptitude tests did not come true, despite affirmative action in favour of minorities (which recently has created a backlash).

• While in the nineteenth century few business leaders had gone to college, by the 1960s, persons who had not attended college had no chance of entering the business elite. This evolution is described by Peter Temin: "I was able to identify the colleges attended by 454 CEOs of the Fortune 500 companies. All current business leaders on whom I could find information attended college, and almost one-fifth graduated from the Ivy League".[1]

• A college degree is nowadays not enough. Graduate education has become more important than undergraduate studies and the training of the business elite now takes place largely in a few top business and law schools in which entry is highly selective. Enrolment in MBA courses is booming and recently 40 of the largest US companies were run by holders of MBA.

• A striking contrast with France regarding the recruitment of the business elite is, however, that there is no "pantouflage" i.e., transfer from the civil service to business. In the US, "businessmen consistently distrust the State,"[2] and rarely

[1] P. Temin, "The American Business Elite in Historical Perspective", in E.S. Brezis and P. Temin (eds), *Elites, Minorities and Economic Growth*, (New York 1999), p. 32.

[2] O. Zunz, "Class", in S.I. Kutler (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Twentieth Century*, (New York 1996), p. 209.

give top business jobs to civil servants or politicians, with the exception of arms manufacturers, who hire retired admirals and generals.

In conclusion, the American recruitment process appears almost as selective and elitist as the British or French. The US economic elite (the CEOs of the 500 largest companies) is still overwhelmingly made up of white Protestant males, a significant number of whom were educated at Ivy League institutions. The picture has not changed significantly from that c. 1900, while the makeup of the political elite has markedly changed in a century: "The American business elite comes from elite families",[3] just as in France or Britain.

[3] P. Temin, *op. cit.* (1999), p.33.