

THE BANKRUPTCY OF THE FRENCH UFO RESEARCH BODY, G.E.P.A.N.

Dr. Jean F. Gilles, Ph.D.

In view of the hard-hitting Editorial from Monsieur F. Lagarde (*A Warning To All*) which we published in FSR Vol. 28, No. 1, and of the equally blunt Guest-Editorial from Dr. J. Allen Hynek which we reprinted in Vol. 28, No. 3, we have thought that many readers would also like to see this article about G.E.P.A.N. by Dr. Jean F. Gilles, a French scientist who is at the American Space Center at Houston, Texas. He describes himself as "a faithful subscriber to FSR since 1970." And he goes on: "I am a confessed opponent of the policy followed by the French official body, G.E.P.A.N., and I continue to consider your unique journal a highly independent one."

Dr. Gilles signs his article as "Chargé of Research, CNRS". It looks therefore as though he is officially attached to N.A.S.A. at the U.S. Space Center at Houston, Texas as a representative of the French CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research).

The article, written by Dr. Gilles in English, has been edited and re-arranged for emphasis.

EDITOR

ON September 12, 1978, I had the opportunity to participate in a 'Preparatory Meeting for Private Investigation Groups Dedicated to the UFO Phenomenon.' This meeting, which had been organised by G.E.P.A.N.¹ (The Group for the Study of Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena) was held at the headquarters of the C.N.E.S.² (French National Centre for Space Studies) in the city of Toulouse, in south-western France. (The C.N.E.S. is thus the French equivalent of the American N.A.S.A.)

The essential driving force at this gathering was Dr. Claude Poher, an engineer by profession, and nephew of a former Chairman of the French Senate.

I had with me two friends, members of a local French UFO study association. We had come there with no illusions, indeed with a pronounced and heavy feeling that nothing to the benefit of Ufology could be expected to emerge from the meeting.

But in fact the pitiful exhibition which followed went far beyond our most pessimistic expectations. For no less than seven hours we had to sit there and listen to the following official theme, propounded over and over again:—

"WE are the ones who KNOW. For WE are the official scientists. As for you others, you private investigators, you don't possess the requisite qualifications. And, even if you did, by any extremely remote chance, possess those qualifications, we still would not be able to take any account of you, precisely because you do not possess the label: 'professional scientist.'

But, on the other hand, as regards the question of investigating UFOs, this subject does not really fall within our field, and, anyway, we have very little spare time. We are consequently obliged to confine ourselves to the framework of the French Hexagon. And we shall confine ourselves to using only the Gendarmerie's³ reports as our source material."

Let us take the various points touched on in this sad litany. Firstly, the last point — the plan to use

only the French Gendarmerie's UFO reports as material for investigation.

We were shown an organisational chart indicating the links between G.E.P.A.N. and the Gendarmerie. An eyewitness's account of a UFO observed by him had to travel up through a considerable length of the whole chain of command before it ended up with a top authority of the Gendarmerie. This top authority, located in Paris, might or might not, as the case might be, then send the report on to G.E.P.A.N. This prompted us to conclude that many of the most interesting and most striking cases — those with the very highest 'strangeness/probability index'⁴ — *do not in fact go to G.E.P.A.N. at all, but go to certain other bodies which are, if we might so term it, of a far less 'obtrusive' nature than G.E.P.A.N. We need, for example, only to recall the extremely rapid⁵ intervention of such 'unidentified' agencies at the time of Marius Dewilde's† sighting at Quarouble in 1954 or of the Valensole affair of 1965 (case of Monsieur Maurice Masse's lavender field landing.)††*

To rely on the Gendarmerie only as a source of UFO reports is like saying that only officially appointed forest rangers are capable of gathering good mushrooms!

The Scientific Attachés who are the permanent staff of G.E.P.A.N. are able to devote no more than ten per cent of their working time to the study of UFOs. We discussed these points with several of them — pleasant, friendly young men — and they admitted to us that, up to a few months previously, they had never even taken any interest in Ufology. So, here again, we see the same old trick being played which was used by those who set up the Condon Committee: they have engaged for G.E.P.A.N. only individuals who were totally uninterested in the UFO Problem and who had had no previous experience whatsoever in this field!

Well now, do you find this sort of guiding principle being applied with regard to research into any other field of knowledge? One would certainly hope not! In general, we find that, when people are selected to en-

gage in certain research work, those picked will be among the candidates who have the best grasp of the subject in question and the deepest interest in it!

This amateurishness towards the practical side of the work leads us on to the next point — a consideration of the sources from which G.E.P.A.N. is financed. The vitally important matter of funds was scarcely mentioned at the Conference in Toulouse. The probability is in fact that the funds available for UFO research would be very small.

Now, all these indications suggest of course that G.E.P.A.N. is no more than a Government-monitored public relations agency. The real, fundamental, research on UFOs is not being done there. It is going on elsewhere, with G.E.P.A.N. serving simply as a front. It is totally outside of the scope of G.E.P.A.N., who have no more access to it than we do.

Should further proof be sought that G.E.P.A.N. is principally an exercise in public relations, we need do no more than take a look at the various individuals who were invited to take part in the Toulouse Conference. These were not folk who had been invited there at random. None of the delegates representing the private UFO investigation groups were professional scientists. They were all manifestly very proud to be invited there, the invitation having an official flavour about it, and the gathering being convened within the framework of the C.N.E.S., the French National Agency for Space Studies.

We even observed one delegate having himself photographed in front of the main gate of the C.N.E.S. where we read, in lovely gold lettering, the words CENTRE NATIONAL D'ETUDES SPATIALES (NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SPACE STUDIES.)

Clearly these folk felt it a great boost to their egos to be invited by an official scientific agency like the C.N.E.S. It wasn't something to be sniffed at! Their attitude consequently was one of *reverence*. For all of us there that day there was something of the sensation of a child receiving elementary teaching and instruction. *Out of the whole long day taken with lectures, just one solitary hour was allocated for free discussion.*

When it was all over, the only conclusion to be drawn was that we had been attending an operation staged with the objective of debunking, demoralising, in mind. For such, after all, is the true purpose of a public relations agency decked out, as G.E.P.A.N. is, in a scientific disguise. The aim is simply to act as a buffer between, on the one hand, the growing public interest in UFOs, and on the other hand, the governmental institutions which normally would have to cope with the UFO Problem.

In the top echelons at G.E.P.A.N. they have of course no illusions and perceive very well what they are doing. *They know!* But, so long as the activities of the Aliens continue to be very discreet, the various governments on this Planet can carry on with their present policy of Silence, of saying nothing. All that is

required, maybe from time to time, is some minor gesture, such as the setting up, say, of G.E.P.A.N. This serves to allay people's worries and calm them down.

All this rather puts us in mind (though of course it is another story) of the role played by certain labour unions in certain countries, whose primary function is to allow the workers to give vent to their frustration by means of '*happenings*', such as 'staged' strikes. All of which however changes nothing. After a little carefully controlled 'fuss', banners are suddenly produced and waved aloft, bearing impressive 'official' looking initials, and the organisers of the strike then proclaim:—

Don't worry! We are the ones who know, and who can fix things. And WE are taking over!"

As we have seen in the case of G.E.P.A.N. and the C.N.E.S., it is all a load of nonsense. All that we have seen is a few individuals playing the roles of "*True Possessors of Knowledge*". These folk make a brief appearance, and then vanish behind the "We Don't Know" Curtain.

Such a display of contempt for the public calls for some comment. One thing that we noticed, for example, was that although a few of the 'Scientific Attachés' did make a personal appearance on the platform, and Dr. Claude Poher did make a show of facing up to his responsibilities (the whole affair was in fact nothing much else but a one-man-show starring Claude Poher), the members of the so-called 'Committee of Wise Men' — the Scientific Committee — were very careful to remain unseen and strictly anonymous.

Just before the meeting closed, we were hastily shown a transparency listing the names of the Scientific Attachés, plus a sketchy organisational chart purporting to indicate the links between G.E.P.A.N. and The-Powers-That-Be.

Courage is not exactly the most frequent trait displayed by the scientific community, though, to be sure, exceptions to this rule do exist. And we met some of them. *We can only pray that not all of our scientific colleagues will have to wait until they are Nobel Prize-winners before they dare to stand up and proclaim, loudly and clearly, what they know about Flying Saucers.*

At the Toulouse Conference, despite all the vigorous thrusting from Jimmy Guieu — who has made his name both as a writer of Science-Fiction and as one of the great pioneers of French Ufology — and despite his bold call from the floor to the thin line of scientists facing us from the platform that they should '*come clean and spill the beans*', it was patently obvious that there was going to be no relaxation. Quite clearly, we, the invited children, were being regarded and treated as children — children from whom certain 'facts of life' had got to be concealed.

Concluding his announcements, Claude Poher then declared that he was resigning from the leadership of

G.E.P.A.N. But nothing was said about the appointment of a successor⁶ to him, and no plans for the future were outlined. The whole affair was thus being terminated in a smog of vagueness and carefully planned let-down. What should have been a solemn and glamorous 'christening ceremony' had turned out to be an apologetic and quasi-clandestine 'funeral service!'

Shortly afterwards, we read this one day in the weekly magazine supplement of the newspaper *Le Figaro* — the unofficial 'journal' of the French Bourgeoisie:—

"... real UFO phenomena are rare. At G.E.P.A.N. we have a few files to chew on. It is highly probable that, if there is no development in the situation within the course of the next two years — and there seems little likelihood that there will be such development — then G.E.P.A.N. will disappear."

That same issue of *Le Figaro* carried the report that Dr. Claude Pöher was just about to set off to sail round the world. We can only say that we hope at any rate that in future the ex-chief of G.E.P.A.N. will have better luck with the sort of boats he pilots.

Houston, Texas.
September 19, 1981.

AUTHOR'S FOOTNOTES

1. G.E.P.A.N. was created by the C.N.E.S. (French National Centre for Space Studies) on January 5, 1977.
2. C.N.E.S. is thus the French equivalent of the American N.A.S.A.
3. The French *Gendarmerie* are a law-enforcement agency with extensive duties. Officially a part of the French Armed Forces, they have a range of powers extending approximately from those of U.S. Marshalls and/or Sheriffs to those of the U.S. National Guard. They have the reputation of being the most benign of France's numerous State Police corps. (A few of which are known under such initials as the D.S.T.; the S.D.E.C.E.; the C.R.S.; the R.G.; the Air Intelligence, etc.) None of these numerous police bodies are in any way under the control of the local citizenry, but they are answerable exclusively to the highly centralised Executive Powers. This means, at the least, answerable to the Attorney-General (equal to 'Secretary of Justice') or, in the cases of the most efficient of them, to the President of the French Republic alone.
4. A classificatory diagram devised by Dr. J. Allen Hynek, Professor Emeritus and Chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Northwestern University. Also former Scientific Consultant to the U.S. Air Force. Founder in 1973 of the Center for

UFO Studies in Evanston, Illinois.

5. We were told, with a great deal of artlessness and a touch of humour, of a case with physical traces (CE II) ... G.E.P.A.N. were there on the site *fourteen days after the event!*
6. Late in November 1978, some time after we had written the first French draft of this paper, Dr. Pöher's successor, Monsieur Alain Esterle, was appointed. However today, three years after that event, our main conclusions regarding G.E.P.A.N. remain unchanged. On the subject of UFOs — about which at least some of the G.E.P.A.N. members do have a little knowledge — you won't hear a whisper there. G.E.P.A.N. is a splendid excuse designed to help private UFO associations and civilian researchers to fall asleep, to retire from the field. And indeed it was for that very purpose that it was devised!

COMMENTS BY EDITOR, FSR

(†) The case of Marius Dewilde (Quarouble, Nord) occurred on September 10, 1954, during the incredible UFO 'Wave' which hit France and Italy and other parts of Western Europe in the summer and autumn of that year. The case has been very well written up in the French books of Ufology and rates as a 'classic', but so far as I can recall it never got into FSR (which was not launched until the following year, 1955). I recall however that the case was carried, and in good detail, prominently in a number of the British newspapers of the time, notably the *Daily Express*. Such treatment would certainly be unthinkable in the British press today. The brief facts of this very interesting case are that the steelworker Marius Dewilde (or de Wilde as some sources gave it) was sitting reading the paper in the kitchen of his home at Quarouble, near the Franco-Belgian frontier, at about 11.00 p.m. when suddenly he noticed that the radio was blotted out by heavy static and he heard his dog howling in terror outside and scrabbling at the door to get in. Going out, he saw a dark object straddling the narrow-gauge railway line that ran by his house, and two small beings in "divers' suits", with big heads, walking beside the rails. Heading towards them to intercept them, he saw a beam of purple light shoot from the dark object on the line, and was instantly paralysed and rooted at the spot. In this state of helplessness he watched the two entities re-enter their craft and take off. The departing UFO blasted off with a sheet of flame and was observed by occupants of several adjacent villages. The French Police and Secret Service were soon on the spot, and they found that the stone chippings of the railway bed at the spot where Dewilde said the craft had stood were strangely blackened and calcined as though by the action of great heat. They also found a number of inexplicable deep indentations in the sleepers. Many years later we learnt through Aimé

Michel that the French Secret Service had calculated that to have made such indentations the craft must have weighed at least 35 tons.

The case is listed very briefly as No. 9 in Dr. Jacques Vallée's article *The Pattern Behind the UFO Landings*, which forms part of FSR's book *The Humnoids* (Ed. Charles Bowen.)

(††) For Charles Bowen's and Aimé Michel's accounts of the even more famous French case at Valensole, see FSR Vol. 11, Nos. 5 and 6 (*A Significant Report from France*) and Vol. 14, No. 1, (*A Visit to Valensole*.)

Dr. Gille's references here to "unidentified" and "unobtrusive" agencies which are the true governmental investigators of UFOs in France relate to the various French Secret Services as indicated by their initials in the Author's footnote No. 3 above. These shadowy but all-powerful and ubiquitous surveillance systems correspond to the many and various establishments of a like nature in the USA and Britain.

As has already been pointed out in FSR on previous occasions, Dr. Hynek himself, when he was a consultant to the U.S. Air Force (*Project Blue Book*) concluded at an early date that the Air Force's alleged involvement in UFO research was possibly purely a 'front' and that the study of all these matters in the United States was probably the task of another, and highly secret, body, which we have sometimes seen referred to in recent years as the 'UFO Board' — allegedly a branch or a dependency of the *National Security Agency*, the USA's most secret arm. Mrs. Coral Lorenzen also indicated years ago in one of her books that she fully realised that the U.S. Air Force was acting as a 'front', and that another body, named by her as the 'UFO Board', was running the true investigation in America.

POSTSCRIPT Just as this issue of FSR goes to press, we notice that the Lorenzens' excellent *APRO Bulletin* (Vol. 30, No. 9) carries a note about this article by Dr. Gille, plus some vitally important comment of their own. After emphasising the relationship between the situation now prevailing in G.E.P.A.N. and Monsieur F. Lagarde's *Warning to All*, Mr. and Mrs. Lorenzen conclude their remarks with the following paragraphs which deserve to be pondered at length by all of us:—

"Monsieur F. Lagarde points out that, like the Condon Committee, G.E.P.A.N.'s 'cooperation' was 'one-way' — from UFO research organisation to GEPAN — period!

"We here at APRO have been observing the UFO field around the world for longer than any other group. We have made some observations which, if we were to delineate them here, would signal to our adversaries concerning just how

much we know, and what we suspect. Lagarde's article is full of his frustration and disappointment. The old 'bait and switch' play started here in the United States. We think it is time for the 'concealers' to begin a new phase of the operation calculated to stifle all UFO knowledge, so we will now wait to see what their next move will be.

"In the case of G.E.P.A.N., we can't help but wonder if Claude Poher, who was respected and admired by UFO researchers throughout France, could have been a sacrificial lamb? Or a Judas goat? Which?"

Meanwhile, rumours have continued to reach FSR which indicated that Dr. Jean Gille's prediction was only too correct, and that G.E.P.A.N. was about to expire quietly.

On February 20 of this year the London *Sunday Times* carried the following article:—

FLYING SAUCERS SOUGHT NO MORE

"In an amusing display of scepticism about the existence of extraterrestrial life, the Mitterand Government has decided to close a unique research establishment set up six years ago to investigate unidentified flying objects.

"But it has encountered unexpectedly stiff opposition from some scientists who are shocked that the Socialists do not believe in flying saucers.

"One scientific writer, Jean-François Boedec, said that the research centre, the *Groupe d'Etudes des Phénomènes Spatiaux*, had paid the price of being too closely associated with the former President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who set it up in 1977.

"The Government denies the closure has been motivated out of political spite. It says the idea was 'an expensive folly'.

"It now emerges that Giscard, who had an almost schoolboy passion for UFOs, was persuaded to open the Centre on the advice of a scientist friend who ran it for a year, then resigned it to sail around the world in a yacht.

"Since then the Centre has been sifting through the dozens of reports of UFOs sent in every year by the public. It distributed instruction manuals to 15,000 police stations on what to look for and what questions to ask eyewitnesses. As an added inducement, each police station was given sophisticated photographic equipment to record any strange light in the sky and help identify its probable source.

"The Centre's most noteworthy success was in exposing two hoaxers who claimed, amid a blaze of publicity in 1979, that they had been 'kidnapped' and held for several days in a spaceship. The exposure took two years."

This intriguing little piece of chitchat inspired us to write off to France, where we have very well-informed contacts in both the political and the ufological spheres, and the picture which has been reported back to us is an interesting one, well worthy of being placed on record.

It seems that France's Socio-Communists have indeed just attempted to kill off G.E.P.A.N., since, being sensible chaps, they all know that UFOs don't exist anyway, and they are indeed convinced that the whole idea of the Centre was simply a silly private fad of Giscard d'Estaing's, just as our London paper had reported. But they ran into trouble and were stopped. *By whom?* Who, in France, is more powerful than the present socialist government and the present socialist President? ANSWER: THE FRENCH ARMY AND THE FRENCH SECRET AND SECURITY SERVICES! These, then, are the people who have secured the reprieve for G.E.P.A.N., because indeed they are the people for whom it was created in the first place.

No other theory makes sense, for the present French Government, having squandered the nation's resources so foolishly, is making desperate efforts to secure economies wherever it can. And therefore, if it has not closed down G.E.P.A.N., this is only because it could not do it.

So G.E.P.A.N. survives. We are left with a curious situation. Our French political/ufological commentator sums it up:—

"G.E.P.A.N. continues. But I will wager that it will never again publish anything. Like Condon before it, but in a slightly different fashion, it will end up under the wraps of military secrecy — without of course saying so. This means that in France, as elsewhere, the Military are hiding what they know about the UFOs."

"And what is it that they know?"

"Yes, Giscard d'Estaing 'was one of us!' But of course he was being encouraged by the Army, who were in fact using him."

FSR BOOKSHELF — 17

New UFO books reviewed by . . .

Janet & Colin Bord

ONE of the most interesting aspects of ufology, and potentially the most fruitful in terms of finding explanations for people's UFO reports, is the study of paranormal phenomena and their relationship to the UFO experience, along with the parallel study of witness psychology, but until recently little work has been done or published in these fields. Now Mark Moravec has collected together the results of his own studies as *PSIUFO Phenomena: A Study of UFOs and the Paranormal* (published by the Australian Centre for UFO studies and available from Arcturus Book Service, 263 N. Ballston Ave., Scotia, N.Y. 12302, U.S.A., price \$13.50 plus postage: 85c in U.S. and \$1 abroad; 138 pages; large-format spiral-bound softcover with clear type-writer print). The main topics under discussion in Part 1 are mental communication, poltergeists, apparitions, healings, ghostlights, and time lapses/abductions, followed by an analysis of Australian cases, and psychological, paranormal and physical interpretations of the data. The author only just acknowledges the possibility that there may be a physical explanation for some UFO experiences, and while accepting the importance of psychological and paranormal explanations, we suspect that a greater number of cases involve sightings of physical craft from an unknown source than Moravec allows for. However this slight interpretational imbalance does not detract from the importance and value of Moravec's work, with which all ufologists who are seriously seeking the answers to

the UFO mystery should be familiar. In Part 2 there is a 30-page list of Australian PSIUFO cases, with details of each, and sources. Part 3 consists of five appendixes, including a comprehensive questionnaire for investigators of PSIUFO phenomena. This publication is a serious, sensible and above all *relevant* contribution to UFO study. Highly recommended.

Many millions of words must have been uttered in the search for a solution to the mystery of the lights seen and filmed from an aircraft off the New Zealand coast four years ago, and now one of the participants, Quentin Fogarty, has written his version of the events and their aftermath: *Let's Hope They're Friendly!* (large-format paperback published by Angus and Robertson, Australia; price A\$9.95; 178 pages; index; illustrated with black and white photographs, and colour stills from the film). If Fogarty and his colleagues had known what was in store for them, they possibly would have decided not to film the strange lights. As Fogarty comments of the first 138 days: 'They were 138 days of hassles, mental and physical strain, rumour, soured friendships and, very occasionally, a little bit of happiness. I certainly got myself a world scoop, but at a price.' The amount of energy that was expended by those convinced that a 'genuine unidentified flying object' had been filmed, and those equally convinced that the film showed Jupiter, or ball lightning, or boat lights, or birds, or whatever, indicates if nothing else that nothing less than a sizeable chunk of a crashed UFO is needed to prove to the world that