

French Premier Described As British Aristocrat

PARIS — A pundit once remarked that all Maurice Couve de Murville lacked to be the perfect Englishman was a umbrilla, but he has already evidenced it—a French figure of speech to describe someone who is stiff.

It is certainly the public image of France's new prime minister presents almost a caricature of a reserved, unostentatious, British aristocrat.

His clothes reflect the somber, fastidious elegance of the British. His golf game is mediocre but he has purchased the finest antique bridge player. He shares the French habit of events in a hostelry, but he is polite and unobtrusive, patient and unpretentious, an aristocrat that can be compared with a British duke.

caustically devastating. But for all his resemblance to the product of a British public school, Maurice Couve de Murville is never unadvised. In every task he has undertaken, the 61-year-old career civil servant has demonstrated a cool, almost mathematical precision in getting over the most difficult and unpleasant jobs done.

THE IMPRESSIVE record of service and accomplishment stretches over a quarter of a century: a gifted technocrat in Charles de Gaulle's World War II provisional government, diplomat and administrator in the brief postwar Gaullist era, one of France's most able ambassadors during the general's 12 years in the political wilderness, foreign minister for 10 years after the Gaullist restoration.

As foreign minister, a post he held longer than any Frenchman since Vichy's fall under Louis XVI, Couve de Murville built up a legendary reputation as the executor of de Gaulle's grand foreign policy strategy. There is a widely reported, though perhaps apocryphal story about de Gaulle and Nikita Khrushchev comparing notes on their respective foreign ministers. The Soviet prime minister boasted that Andrei Gromyko was so faithful that if he was ordered to sit on a block of ice, he would remain there until the ice melted away. de Gaulle is said to have replied that if Couve de Murville sat on a block of ice, the ice would melt.

ANOTHER STORY, this one undoubtedly true, describes Couve de Murville's reaction to the usual's dramatic return to power in 1958, and his own appointment as foreign minister. When an aide came panting up to the 42nd hole of the country club to report that the general had made his comeback and had summoned the then ambassador to West Germany to his side, Couve de Murville politely thanked the messenger and then coolly proceeded to sink a difficult putt.

To most Frenchmen, Couve de Murville does indeed appear to be an iceberg, incapable of ordinary human emotions, but those associates insist this is only a mask, part of his professional diplomatic fit, now

that he is in a different job, a job that requires a popular touch as well as administrative and negotiating capacities, they are confident he will prove more than equal to the task.

Couve de Murville's experience as a practicing politician, as a figure for domestic consumption instead of an export model, is extremely limited. In fact, only the residents of the two most posh sections of Paris have had the chance to shake his hand during an election campaign. But his supporters argue that the outgoing prime minister, Georges Pompidou, was more of a political chameleon when de Gaulle installed him in 1962.

ACTIVE POLITICAL life began for Couve de Murville in the spring of 1927, when he unexpectedly ran for a seat in the National Assembly from the 7th Arrondissement of the capital, long his home and the site of the Foreign Ministry.

After a hard-fought campaign, in which he drank raw aperitifs with workmen in cafes, and solemnly visited a clan of chameleons in a bistrot, meticulously visited convents to allay suspicions of his Protestant background, Couve de Murville lost by the thin margin of 255 votes. Despite the election setback, perhaps the greatest disappointment in his career, Couve de Murville was renominated foreign minister. But political insiders were convinced that if Couve de Murville had won, de Gaulle would have made him prime minister.

In the new legislative elections in June, Couve de Murville switched to a neighboring Paris constituency and scored an unquestioned victory.

For a number of years and required to hold National Assembly seats to enter the cabinet. Indeed, when Pompidou was named prime minister, he had never seen a candidate for public office. Recently, however, de Gaulle has encouraged his ministers to prove that they have "the confidence of the people."

Even before the power elections de Gaulle seemed to be positioning Couve de Murville as a potential prime minister. After the May revolt by students and workers, the veteran foreign minister was moved to the finance ministry, putting him in the cabinet hot seat for de-

more than a lightning rod if things turn sour. And they expect the new prime minister to remain the colorless, aloof, behind-the-scenes tactician he appeared to be as foreign minister. But they may be in for a surprise.

IN AN INFORMAL television appearance last winter, the supposedly diffident Couve de Murville made an extremely favorable impression on the man in the street.

In his short stay at the Finance Ministry, he seemed to reflect a new style to match

his new job, taking great pains to explain his policies to the public in a direct, no-nonsense but down-to-earth manner.

The son of a judge in Reims, in northeastern France, Couve de Murville made a habit of winding up at the top of his class in a brilliant academic career. After taking a law degree, he passed a grueling civil service examination to win the coveted title of "inspector of finance" at age 23.

As a civil servant in the powerful Finance Ministry and later in the Foreign Ministry,

he served under the Vichy regime of Marshal Petain until 1943, when he joined the Free French in Algiers.

Couve de Murville has three married daughters. His pet dachshund was a familiar figure in the Foreign Ministry.

Gems Grown In Marsh Gas

The first conclusive demonstration that diamonds can be grown from marsh gas (methane) has been made by a chemical engineering group at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

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Octopuses Used For Mind Study

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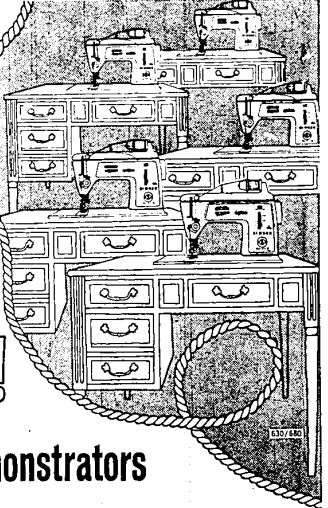
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