



Alexis de Tocqueville. *Oeuvres Complètes: Correspondance et Œcrits Locaux*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995. 759 pp. FF 320.00 (paper), ISBN 978-2-07-073960-8.

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Tocqueville as Local Leader and Politician

Like several of its predecessors in Tocqueville's collected works, this volume contains some works frequently quoted elsewhere and a wealth of material otherwise unavailable in print. A long preface guiding the reader through the documents and relating them to people and events in the *Manche* in Normandy is provided by Andre-Jean Tudesq, who has already contributed much to the understanding of the political system of Louis Philippe and the prominent role of provincial *notables* in that system.[1] The balance of the volume contains a chronological arrangement of letters (pp. 49-587) and diverse reports, speeches, and articles (pp. 591-745) produced between 1836 and 1858. The emphasis of the writings is upon local political affairs, and readers familiar with Tocqueville's political ideas primarily from his well-known books will here meet an entirely different person. This volume reveals an ambitious man with good local connections ardently pursuing an active political career and passionately involved in the smallest political issues. This career perfectly illustrates Tudesq's model of the role of the local *notable* in nineteenth-century French politics. The documents illuminate Tocqueville's two unsuccessful electoral campaigns, his election and service as deputy from his home *departement* of the *Manche* in Normandy (1839-1851), and his service on the General Council of the *Manche* (1842-1852).

From youth, Tocqueville had craved public service; he regarded his education, judicial service, and writing projects essentially as training to prepare him for politics.[2] After the publication in January 1835 of the first volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville's life

changed rapidly, and a political career seemed attainable. He gained an international reputation for political astuteness, received an independent income from his writings, married his long-time love Mary Mottley, and suffered the loss of his mother (January 1836). He also reached the age of thirty, the minimum for election to the Chamber of Deputies. After the death of Tocqueville's mother, his father and older brothers agreed to place in Alexis' hands the sixteenth century family chateau in the village of Tocqueville in the *arrondissement electoral* of Valognes. Like many young *notables*, Tocqueville had gained education and experience elsewhere in France and then returned to his ancestral home, where family connections could assist him in building a political base. Such personal relationships were crucial, as each of the eight *arrondissements electoraux* in the *Manche* contained only five to six hundred voters. Tocqueville quickly began renovating the chateau and cultivating the favor of neighboring electors and political leaders.

As the correspondence demonstrates, the launching of his political career required careful groundwork. Normandy was a highly traditional, closely knit world where the important political positions were already held by members of equally prominent families. The editors have provided excellent tables of and footnotes identifying local officials and contemporary issues. The earliest letters (pp. 49-125) reveal a political novice building a grassroots network, deferring to his elders, writing ingratiating notes to local journals, and maneuvering for position in local civic organizations. He refused to use his title of count and considered his aristocratic heritage a po-

litical liability because most of his correspondents and electors were bourgeois. On occasion he reminded correspondents that aristocrats, too, could be liberals, citing the marquis de Lafayette and comte de Mirabeau (p. 110-13). His first opportunity to run for the Chamber revealed the complexities of Norman politics. He wanted the seat vacated in 1836 by the retirement of his brother's father-in-law mid-way through the session; but an older, already established *notable* successfully laid claim to the seat—and became a lifelong enemy.

Tocqueville's political prospects improved after he gained support from key figures who thereafter guided his campaigns. The most able of these operatives, politely called electoral agents, was Paul Clamorgan, descendant of an old Norman bourgeois family which had produced a mayor of the town of Valognes and a sub-prefect. Paul Clamorgan was a liberal, Bonapartist lawyer. Content with local office himself, Clamorgan quickly settled upon the famous author as future deputy from his *arrondissement*. In the nationwide election of 1837, Tocqueville and Clamorgan together waged a vigorous campaign for Valognes' five hundred electoral votes and narrowly lost to the incumbent. After the king dissolved parliament in 1839, Tocqueville defeated several opponents in Valognes to begin his career as deputy. The documents concerning these campaigns provide fascinating insights into the political processes of the July Monarchy. The local press enjoyed great influence, judging from the attention which Tocqueville paid to it. The government tolerated considerable opposition in this department and its pressures on the electors appeared relatively light. Indeed, the government ordered the sub-prefect (Clamorgan's own uncle) not to attack Tocqueville directly, but to assist the incumbent, who was actually a member of the moderate opposition.

Some of Tocqueville's practices as deputy were incompatible with the principles he enunciated in his published works. In print and in speeches, Tocqueville criticized the prevailing patronage system and asserted that the state bureaucracy was too large and powerful. Yet he used his influence as deputy to obtain for Clamorgan an appointment as tax-collector (*percepteur*) at Valognes and won favors for other supporters (pp. 136-38). Tocqueville also won a seat on the General Council for the Manche, the elected body which worked hand in hand with the prefect. Then, as deputy, Tocqueville placed local concerns before the Chamber and sought national funding for various projects. He persistently requested funds for a railway to be built from Paris to Cherbourg, a project beneficial to Normandy's economic development. How-

ever, seeking funding from the government in Paris appeared to contradict the emphasis he himself placed on local self-help and initiative; he turned to national funding of the railway only after a fruitless search for private money. Indeed, Tocqueville appeared to be doing favors for wealthy supporters, who included ship-owners and public works contractors. As Tudesq noted in another regard, Tocqueville's opposition to the July regime appeared stronger in rhetoric than in practice (p. 27).

Despite wielding his patronage power and trading support for departmental projects, Tocqueville throughout his career insisted he would remain "independent" and never obligate himself to the ministerial majority or to any parliamentary faction. He reserved the right to judge each issue on its merits, as he saw them. This freedom from factional alignments won approval from local voters but created occasional difficulties. Adversaries on the right and left charged him with cynically accepting the courtship of both sides in political battles. These charges infuriated Tocqueville, who considered them assaults upon his honor. For example, in 1844-45 Tocqueville supported the government's educational reform laws, which allowed the Catholic Church to retain a significant role in education while providing secular classes at the university level. Liberals believed Tocqueville had betrayed them, while Clamorgan warned him that his stance was too anti-clerical for local tastes and apparently edited Tocqueville's speeches for local distribution (pp. 26-27, 319-322).

The revolution of 1848 made the prophet of democracy and enemy of Louis Philippe the leading figure in his department.^[3] It also led to a serious difference of opinion with Clamorgan. The campaign operative avidly supported Louis Napoleon for President of the Republic, while Tocqueville unenthusiastically supported the moderate republican General Louis-Eugene Cavaignac. Tensions increased and their correspondence stopped for several months. After Louis Napoleon triumphed, Tocqueville wrote Clamorgan an apology: he had acted to preserve his own "independence" and could now support Louis Napoleon if he remained within the bounds of the constitution (pp. 497-98). Tocqueville's sense of honor was acute: he had wished to make clear that he had not struck a bargain with Louis Napoleon. He continued to endorse a sure loser with whom he had come to disagree rather than appear to switch to the winning side for his own political benefit. With Cavaignac's defeat, Tocqueville regarded himself free to support Louis Napoleon without either man being obligated to the other.

Having preserved his "independence" in the 1848 election, Tocqueville could accept from Louis Napoleon several months later the portfolio for foreign affairs without fearing that others might consider the ministry a reward for earlier political services. In mid-1851 he advised the Chamber to revise the constitution so that Louis Napoleon could legally retain executive power, but this suggestion was not adopted. Tocqueville opposed only token resistance to the presidential coup d'état against the National Assembly in December 1851 and then retired to the Manche. He remained on the General Council until the government announced that all office-holders must swear an oath of allegiance to the new regime by 15 May 1852. Tocqueville took an extended leave of absence and then allowed his term to expire. He hoped, since he had not actually refused the oath, that he might later reenter political life (p. 725). He addressed very few letters to local residents after mid-1852. He travelled, wrote *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, and slowly succumbed to tuberculosis. It is fitting that this volume concludes with documents from the General Council of the Manche, showing Tocqueville dealing with routine issues of municipal and departmental affairs (roads, schools, impoverished unwed mothers). In *Democracy in America* he maintained that the preservation of liberty in a demo-

cratic society depended upon active engagement by citizens in local civic affairs; the records of the General Council of the Manche show Tocqueville practicing that principle with a high degree of dedication. Volume Ten of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Alexis de Tocqueville not only contributes to the general goal of publishing all of his written works, but also reveals a fascinating local perspective upon his complex political career.

Notes:

[1]. Andre-Jean Tudesq, *Les grands notables en France (1840-1849): étude historique d'une psychologie sociale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1964).

[2]. A balanced account of Tocqueville's life is Andre Jardin, *Alexis de Tocqueville, 1805-1859* (Paris, 1984).

[3]. Tocqueville's contributions to the departmental committee are analyzed in E. Lhomme, *Un département français sous la monarchie de juillet. Le conseil général de la Manche et Alexis de Tocqueville* (Paris, 1933).

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