that the world has witnessed, one of those struggles which resound into the far distant future because they have marked a turning point in the history of humanity, an imposing step towards an era of immense progress for the ideas of freedom, justice and social solidarity.

At the beginning, in fact, for most of those who took part in it, the Affair was only a question of justice and humanity. But as the struggle proceeded against all the combined forces of oppression, it assumed an unsuspected scope which continued to increase until full light was shed on it, bringing with it a significant change in ideas. Discoveries were made in succession, bringing new substance each day, forcing minds to reflect and gradually to change their ideas on a whole host of questions which otherwise would not have concerned them. Education took place progressively, traditions died away. All the important reforms which were implemented successively in the governments of Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes would never have been accepted without the Affair, which slowly but surely prepared the minds of the public for them.


Appendix 46: Letter from Esterhazy in London to *La Libre Parole*, 3 July 1906

Letter of Mr. Esterhazy
London, 29 June 1906

Sir,

Alone, abandoned by all, in the most atrocious situation, I had promised myself that I would not say a word during all the proceedings of the Dreyfus Review. But my attention has been brought to the abominable outrages, the nameless insults with which in their true panic even those who should have defended me condemn me or have me condemned, and I cannot remain silent. I ask you for access to the pages of *La Libre Parole*, to try and make my protest heard, in despair in the face of such cowardice and stupidity. From the very start in 1897, I wanted to tell the truth, believing that it was the best thing to do. I was ordered to remain silent, to obey, with a formal assurance that ‘my superiors would protect me’. I obeyed, as I had throughout my life and I think that at that point any man in my place would have done the same. But I considered the course of action taken to be absurd and shared my feelings on this matter with those I trusted or believed I could trust and told them the truth;

However, as long as my superiors did not abandon me and kept their commitments towards me, which they repeated to my friends and at my trial, all went well. With M. Cavaignac, everything changed; he immediately lost his head, and badly advised, believed he played a master stroke by throwing Henry and myself overboard. Everyone knows what followed;

A campaign of vile abuse even more abominable than that peddled by the defenders of Dreyfus – who at least were fighting for their man and their cause – began against me; and from one day to the next, those who carried or had me carried in triumph, threw themselves upon me like howling dogs. Never has one seen a faster or more cynical about-turn. ‘They abandoned him, they are lost’, said *L’Aurore*, and one had to be foolish not to see that each blow they aimed at me, struck them as well;

I endured all these appalling cowardly acts without saying anything. During the enquiry of the Supreme Court of Appeal, in 1899, my lawyer M. Cabanes – whose letters testify to this – received on my behalf all manner
of assurances from high-ranking figures, saying that they regretted what Cavaignac had done, and, through him, I was pressed with fine promises to remain silent. Trusting my lawyer, I foolishly believed them; thus it was with great indignation that I read the depositions before the Court which they had thought should remain secret.

Outraged, I broke my silence.

Since then, in Rennes, I overwhelmed the President of the Court Martial, the Government Commissioner and the Generals with letters reminding them of the truth, entreating them to speak it, since they knew it as well as I did. There was nothing doing. They wanted to destroy themselves. Later, at my urgent request – because in the face of so many lies, I wanted a trace of the truth to remain – I appeared before the General Consul of France. I told him everything – not in the presence of a solicitor, as someone said who does not even know what a solicitor and an affidavit are – but before the General Consul, whose chancellor recorded my deposition without deletions or corrections, and copied the documents I presented. Those who had received my confidences in 1897 could see that this deposition was the faithful reproduction of what I had always said. It is the truth – the truth which explains everything, whereas the other versions leave a thousand points obscure.

M. Cavaignac had invented a system that did little honour to his intelligence, not to mention his courage and heart. To M. Cabanes, who was telling him that he was going to force me to speak in spite of myself, he [Cavaignac] had answered that measures had been taken and that I would be discredited to the extent that nobody would believe me any more. A stupid policy which all have followed blindly since then and is the cause of their ruin today.

That I was the author of the bordereau, everyone knows; and even more so those who impudently deny it, whether they are from the [Ecole] Normale, Polytechnique or Charenton. The director of the paper which today attacks me with the filthiest of assaults knew about it through a friend who told him at the time when Cavaignac was beginning his fine manoeuvres against Henry and me, which have worked so successfully!

Everyone knew about it from the beginning. Yes, I obeyed the orders of Colonel Sandherr, with whom I had dealings, to whom I took documents, who passed me replies to lists of questions. Yes, I was a counter-espionage agent, and it is a strange error to say that no officer ever performed this service. There were (Agents), and always will be in all the armies of the world, because it is an effective means of counterattacking the intentions of the enemy. I performed important services; I believe it and have been told so.

One only needs to reread my deposition at the General Consulate and refer to the records of the General Staff that I indicate, to see the manoeuvres of the highest authorities in 1897, in order to conceal this act which I had carried out on a precise order. Many of those who scurrilously attack me today with astounding cowardice, pampered me at the time, sought the communications which I took, on order, to newspapers, and were the first to tell me then that they knew the role I had played.

Today when the stupidity and cowardice of the protagonists have made them lose the game, I am the one they still pursue, and they return to this ‘substitution’ – as they call it – one of the most improbably stupid inventions of this affair, in which there is a heap of stupidities. I do not speak of the material fact; discussing it would be grotesque, if it were not so lamentable. But the reasons invoked to support it are even more unbelievable.

If I was an actor in this saga, I would have asked for payment, I suppose. I
had no money at the time when the supporters of Dreyfus represented me as selling my country for the weight of gold. For eight years now, I have been in the greatest penury, since the time when the inventors of this substitution represented me as having forged the means to have him rehabilitated.

All that of course, for nothing.

Even more stupid than scoundrels are the people with their so called superior knowledge from the Ecole Normale, Polytechnique and Charenton. All those who know me here know of my poverty, the painful life which I lead, very often deprived of the most essential items; they can tell how often I have been without bread or a fire.

In abandoning me as they did, those who should have defended me, those who had linked their cause to mine, who had lavished their assurances and promises to my defenders, are abominable cowards: they have committed an infamy with respect to the memory of my family, valiant soldiers who were their leaders, whose son they had promised to protect. They have destroyed themselves because cowardice never leads to victory. And if I were the 100,000th part of the man they themselves represent, they would be poor nameless wretches, for they would have used me like a shield to save their skin and cast me off afterwards.

But if the masters are wretched people without courage, they believed they were saving their own skin. What should one say of the lackeys? They can heap on me their most disgusting infamy, they will never reach the names they deserve.

Cowards who do not even remember their own baseness towards me; cowards who, in high-sounding words, sought for me a commission as Lieutenant-Colonel and who now have me affronted by stupid imbeciles; cowards even down to their puerile quibbling, of which they do not believe a single word!

For eight years, I have suffered all that a human being can suffer; I have not seen my dear children, whom I left as little girls and are now women.

On various occasions, offers of money were made to me; I refused them and, yet I was in the deepest penury. La Libre Parole once published proof of this, and the German who came from Berlin to make me accuse Henry, unmasked by his name, breathed not a word of it.

I have never betrayed my country; it is not true; I have served it as a soldier on the battlefield, and I have also served it elsewhere, as I had agreed to conceal this fact from the superior, the friend whose orders I was carrying out; and there too, I have given service.

I have never deserved the horrible destiny which befell me. If there is inherent justice, it will cruelly strike those who treated me in such cowardly and unworthy fashion; it is their cowardice towards me which has destroyed them, which has destroyed France; and their sorry lackeys will invent in vain all the most cowardly stupidities against me; for the more they strike me, the more they lose the cause which would surely have triumphed with a little more heart and intelligence.

Major Esterhazy