

IPS Translation

Excerpts from Speech by Former Gaullist Minister of Agriculture, April 7, 1976

The following are excerpts of a speech given by former French Minister of Agriculture and currently Socialist Party member Edgard Pisani, at the High Institute for Trade here April 7. The speech, which had been advertized among university-educated layers and political circles, was heard by a numerous audience, including representatives from the ruling Independent Republican and Gaullist (UDR) parties.

Although not a "historical" Gaullist, Edgard Pisani was Minister of Agriculture in the governments of Gaullist Prime Ministers Michel Debre and Georges Pompidou between 1961 and 1967, and became known and respected for his strong adherence to the principles of land restructuration (**remembrement**) and mechanization of French farming. The implementation of these policies was one of the most positive accomplishments of General Charles De Gaulle's administration (1958-1969).

Edgard Pisani left the Gaullist movement on May 22, 1968 because of his fundamental agreement with many demands of the several millions of students and workers involved in the well-known general strike at that time. After removing himself from the national political scene for a few years, Pisani joined the Socialist Party in 1974.

For 30 years, there has been no increase in per capita food consumption worldwide. The capacity of the advanced sector has gone over its own needs while the Third World is starving — and still exporting food. As the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations said in its report, we must multiply food production in the advanced sector to the maximum in order to feed the world's population at a decent level. Unfortunately, we are not sure of our capability to provide transport of this food to the Third World, so we must aim for self-sufficiency in food production in the Third World itself.

To achieve self-sufficiency, the Third World must reach five per cent annual growth rates. There are few virgin lands left to exploit, but of course the Mekong River Delta and the Ganges River Basin could be brought into higher levels in exploitation. However, this is only about 10 to 12 per cent of the land under cultivation and is insufficient. Imports of industrial equipment and chemical fertilizer can help but the Third World cannot even pay for this.

The 'Green Revolution' is dying now since the developing countries cannot pay for the high fertilizer imports needed. Oceans and non-conventional means of food are a difficult and expensive consideration for the Third World since the rich countries will immediately get a higher rise in productivity from such methods than the Third World.

So I am saying that Third World agriculture must get absolute priority. We must feed these populations. These countries have been seduced by the nutritional myth and they

have failed to sufficiently stress agriculture.

The USSR is an example of extraordinary waste. The Soviet Union is tied up in crazy agricultural reforms which have failed. This is also true for the once-fertile Mesopotamian-Iranian region. Algeria has the same problem. Both Third World governments and the World Bank — and I heavily stigmatize the latter — are looking only for a return on their investment in industry rather than investing in agricultural development. The top priority is the education of cadre to improve agriculture and to spare the immense waste. This must be accompanied by a fundamental modification of mentality and the capacity to rapidly acquire new technologies.

We must move into fundamental research on tropical agriculture. We have fully mastered temperate agriculture already and now we must use intermediate technologies for the development of the Third World. There are too many midwestern tractors sitting around going to waste.

We must not diminish the number of people employed on the land in the developing sector, but rather increase it. There are too few jobs in the industrial centers of the Third World anyway and so for a time — and I stress that this is not permanent — we should consider wheel barrow methods...

Agricultural revolutions without concomitant revolutions in social attitudes will not work....

The advanced sector must produce at its maximum, otherwise world economic equilibrium will crack. There must be price stabilization measures, essentially suspending the law of the marketplace.

(Mr. Pisani launched an extended attack on the 1973-74 speculative operations of Chicago-based U.S. financiers.)

We need a world agricultural policy. We are entering into a long period of (economic) fluctuations of extraordinary depth.

We are also entering into a period of strategic domination by the U.S. and Canada — (Canada by the way, is more discreet about it). They plan to use their enormous production (of food) as a strategic weapon. I cite (President) Ford, (Sen. Hubert) Humphrey and that genius-gangster (Secretary of State) Kissinger — and I mean what I say about Kissinger — anybody can challenge me on him. The U.S. alone dominates 50 per cent of (food) exports internationally.

While the Soviets gain important strategic advantages otherwise, they deal with the U.S. for grain whereas China is self-sufficient. Either the Soviets are waving a wooden sword or else they are storing up food stocks to prepare for war.

If the agricultural population of France drops below a certain (economic) level all hell will break loose. I am not saying that you have to make a gutter policy but there are certain things ordinary people are just not going to stand for

and you can't govern realistically if you don't take that into account.

(Mr. Pisani then expressed strong approval of the European Economic Community's (EEC) report on state aid to agriculture and vigorously attacks new EEC proposals to allow African products onto the EEC markets. According to Pisani, this would wipe out French farmers profits on first season vegetables. He stressed that production should be aided so it could be sold at the lowest price possible since most buyers are barely solvent at present. Pisani emphasized the dangerous collapse of European agricultural

production and the elimination of southern Europe as a productive zone.)

Not a single additional peasant should be forced to leave the land due to unemployment. Massive credits must be extended to the agricultural sector....

In response to a question posed by IPS following his presentation, Mr. Pisani agreed that moratoria on the external debt of developing sector nations is absolutely essential to the implementation of the development projects he proposed.