

## In The Upcoming French Elections:

# Where Does National Interest Lie?

In mid-March 1978, the French population will go to the polls to fill 491 seats in the national legislature, the National Assembly. That vote will determine the composition of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's Cabinet and, therefore, go a long way in shaping France's policies in the international arena.

### FRANCE

Under Giscard, France is now providing critical support to the government of West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in resisting the "soft energy" and "devil take all" monetary policies emanating from Washington and London, as well as in combating terrorism. France is also playing a major part in quietly shaping ongoing Middle East peace negotiations around a perspective of mutual interest in regional industrial development. With the Third World generally and with the Soviet Union, France enjoys a very special relationship

The legislative elections will serve as an important test for the future of this policy orientation. The elections will reveal whether the popular mandate exists for continuing on the present course and, secondly what is the most appropriate correlation of political factions to see those policies through. At the present time, there are three clearly identifiable policy options emerging in the preelection debate, only one of which truly represents the national interests of France. The other options, if carried into action, would be disastrous and lead in short order to a subjugation of the nation to the whims of London and its allies.

The only policy proposal that holds any promise for long-term stability is former Prime Minister Michel Debré's "national safety" government. Such a coalition would cut across party lines on the basis of a *policy* commitment to a three to four-year national economic recovery plan. The political motive-force of such a government would be a labor-industry alliance drawing on sympathetic elements of the Gaullist (RPR) party, the French Communist Party (PCF), and its affiliated trade union, the million-strong CGT. The historical precedent for such a government can be located in the immediate postwar government of General Charles de Gaulle, in which PCF member Joliot-Curie was appointed to create the French Atomic Energy Commission and continued for many years to play a leading role in the

expansion of France's nuclear capacity.

Barring that happy solution, France is confronted with a choice of the lesser of two evils. In the event of a definitive split in the Communist-Socialist Union of the Left, a second policy option would be suggested in the form of an alliance of the French Socialist Party (SP) with the polymorphous middle ground of French politics that politely describes itself as the Center. President Giscard d'Estaing formerly referred to this alternative as an "advanced liberal" society; in actuality, this is the option most often touted by the American think-tank community and its press outlets, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Last week the French press reported that U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski now favors a Giscard-Mitterrand coalition. The historical precedent for this type of coalition is the Atlanticist Fourth Republic of the 1950s and its disastrous colonial and domestic policies, paved the way for de Gaulle's 1958 coup, as well as the Vietnam War.

Finally, to the extent that the French Communists and French Socialists can negotiate their differences, the possibility of a United Left majority emerging from the legislative elections is real. However, because of the deep-seated incompatibility, bordering on downright hostility, of the two parties on all major policy issues, such a coalition would quickly grind to a halt, leading in all probability to either of the other two alternatives or, worse, to a NATO-run coup.

### Atlanticist Fourth Republic

Recent national opinion polls do not adequately reflect the subjective side of the preelection environment. Between now and March, the key determining features of the elections will rest on the policy initiatives of the parties, particularly the Gaullist opening toward the working class base of the PCF, and the resolution of the factional situation within the PCF.

Public opinion samples show the Gaullists and Socialist parties now entering the lists with 24 percent of the national vote apiece; the Communists with 20 percent; and Giscard's Republican Party (RP) trailing alongside the Centrists with 13 and 10 percent of the vote respectively. On these readings, it might appear that the current Gaullist-Republican-Centrist coalition could be maintained with a shoestring majority in the National Assembly. However, such a coalition would be forced to maintain a delicate balance among its factions on major policy questions and would be increasingly susceptible to

the "tipping" potential of marginal political parties, such as the ecologists.

The tenuousness of the present coalition is further underscored by the adamant commitment of President Giscard d'Estaing and Prime Minister Raymond Barre to a domestic austerity policy, which is driving the general population more and more to the Left. Presumably aimed at "strangling inflation," so far the so-called Barre Plan has only succeeded in strangling industrial production and the economy generally.

### Gaullists Prepare for Hard Fight

With this in mind, the renamed Gaullist party, the Rally for the Republic (RPR), has mobilized since its national convention two weeks ago to ensure a strong showing in the March elections. The RPR's program reflects many of the key progrowth features of Debré's "national safety" proposal, and a strong RPR vote in March would indicate significant support for Debré's ideas. The program calls for a 5 percent annual growth rate (compared to government projections of less than 3 percent growth at the present time), capital investment, and the creation of skilled jobs. To realize their electoral goals, 395 RPR candidates have been designated to run in the elections.

Debré and RPR President and Mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac have personally interceded with President Giscard d'Estaing, urging the government to break with its domestic austerity policy and to move into a national recovery mode. In early December, within 24 hours of each other, Debré and Chirac privately laid their cards before the President. Debré emerged from his talks warning that France is in a "state of war" and that "battles must be waged on the monetary, energy, and export fronts." He concluded with a call for "rather broad" national reconciliation around this perspective, requesting a similar meeting with Raymond Barre, who replaced Chirac as Prime Minister last summer. Chirac has pointed out that some of the RPR's economic proposals "could be taken immediately, since they are fired by the urgency" of the situation.

The Debré-Chirac meetings are but one facet of a double-edged approach the RPR is taking toward the government. On the one hand, the party is maximizing pressure on the government to shift gears on economic policy before the situation deteriorates further and, secondly, ensuring that the French population understands the RPR is *not* committed to the President's policies despite their participation in the present coalition government. To this end, Jacques Chirac toured the country last summer and fall, speaking to large audiences in left-leaning working-class areas about the RPR program and underscoring its strong nuclear energy development plan.

### Socialist-Centrist Abomination

A Socialist-Centrist coalition would, on the contrary, overthrow the policy perspective currently in effect and would incarnate the policies that the City of London has

sought to impose on France since General de Gaulle thwarted their NATO machinations 20 years ago. Such a government would enjoy the support of the Centrist parties led by the likes of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber; elements of President Giscard d'Estaing's own Republican Party, most notably former Interior Minister Michel Poniatowski; major sections of the Socialist Party; and a specifically Anglophile renegade faction of the Gaullist party.

The programmatic glue for this conglomeration would include all of the worst features of the programs currently being urged on the U.S. Congress by Messrs. Blumenthal, Schlesinger, and Mondale, but with a peculiarly French air. That is: dissolution of the centralized state into bickering regional interests; enforced industrial backwardness; "soft," i.e. non-nuclear, energy; small-scale agriculture; and a "social contract" for labor, characterized primarily by a French version of local workers' control, *autogestion*.

At the present time, the most active figures lobbying for this option include Michel Poniatowski of the Republican Party and "leftist economist" Michel Rocard of the Socialist Party. Rocard is building his credibility by adjusting to the popular support for the government's nuclear energy policy. Earlier this fall, Rocard was in the United States drumming up support from the State Department and the top think tanks, including the Council on Foreign Relations. In November, he toured London's equivalent organizations, such as the Royal Institute for International Affairs, and met with British Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey.

Rocard's simulated support for nuclear energy runs directly against the grain of official Socialist Party policy, but more especially, against Socialist Party leader François Mitterrand's control over the party. There is every reason to suspect that Rocard would like to replace Mitterrand at the helm of the Socialist Party. Mitterrand's career has had a one-to-one correspondence with the ups and downs of the Union of the Left, as well as being overexposed during his warmongering days as Interior Minister under the Fourth Republic.

Other SP supporters of a Socialist-Centrist coalition include the bevy of "radical economists" around Jacques Delors, a former advisor to Gaullist Jacques Chaban-Delmas; Pierre Uri, a former associate of Atlanticist Jean Monnet and a former representative of Lehman Brothers in France; and pro-NATO defense specialist, Jacques Attali.

Michel Poniatowski made a political comeback last week in a nationally televised speech announcing his candidacy in the March elections. He was invited to leave the government in 1976, following his repeated efforts to undermine the President's Gaullist allies. Rumors persist in Paris that Poniatowski may be appointed Foreign Minister after the March elections. Perhaps in anticipation, Poniatowski has scheduled a London tour, following in Rocard's footsteps.

It is unfortunately the case that Poniatowski exercises an undeserved influence on President Giscard d'Estaing, who was personally brought through the ranks of the Republican Party by the Polish prince. It is also unfortunately the case that the President has a strong proclivity toward a Centrist-Socialist alliance. His

recent policy orientation is largely due to the pressure brought to bear on his government by the Gaullists and by international factors, bearing most directly on France's national interests, such as nuclear energy development.

Poniatowski's activities have also struck a responsive chord within the Gaullist party, largely among that layer most heavily influenced by British Fabian ideology. In this grouping are Minister of Justice Alain Peyrefitte, the author of an explicitly anti-Cartesian analysis of the French ideology, *Le Mal Français*; former Minister of Regional Planning Olivier Guichard, who has recently taken to stumping with Socialist Party members on the need for decentralization; and Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Giscard's opponent in the 1974 presidential elections and the author of a Rousseauvian "new social contract" for France.

### Whither the PCF?

The creation of a Socialist-Centrist coalition depends in no small part on the prospects of a final break in the Union of the Left. In turn, the crucial factor in determining the fate of the Union of the Left rests with the resolution of the faction fight within the French Communist Party, the second largest communist party in the West. If the self-styled "new Communist" grouping around Secretary General Georges Marchais gains the upper hand in the party on the basis of an opportunistic compromise with the Socialists to win the elections, then France could, in fact, emerge from the March legislative voting with a left government.

The so-called Common Program of the left in fact provides no *policy* basis whatsoever for governing the nation; rather, it is a stew of contradictions reflecting the fundamental dichotomy in the Socialist-Communist relationship: measures for a strict zero-growth, workers-control orientation set against a strong industrial and technological development perspective. With such a mash to guide them, the Left simply cannot govern France. The nation's biggest trade union, the CGT, has confirmed this by promising a strike wave if a left government were to continue the current domestic austerity policies.

However, a left government would serve the purpose of focusing French politics in a self-destructive "left versus right" contest, effectively destroying the basis for cross-

party political arrangements, as outlined by Debre's "national safety" proposal. In such a situation, France would be overripe for a coup, orchestrated by London.

Therefore, the key on the left rests with the French Communists; in particular, whether those elements which shared and understood the tradition of the Resistance period and the de facto cooperation with the de Gaulle governments, whether certain trade-union and scientific layers can be rallied to some form of the "national safety" perspective.

This factional tendency is closely associated with recent PCF policy orientations toward Italy and Portugal. In both cases, the PCF has developed its orientation on the basis of the *policies* that best serve those nations' interest. Therefore, the PCF has supported the PCI in its defense of the progrowth and antiterrorism orientation of the Christian-Democratic Andreotti government and has supported Alvaro Cunhal and the Portuguese Communist Party in toppling the Social-Democratic government of Mario Soares because of its defense of International Monetary Fund austerity measures. The PCF has also developed a joint working commission with the Italian Communists specifically to develop joint economic policies "around a perspective of economic expansion."

The danger, however, is represented in recent marked shifts in other aspects of PCF policy, largely at the hands of the party's Paris "café intellectual" circles, dominated by Jean Elleinstein, Pierre Juquin, and Paul Laurent. Following recent flare-ups in its relationship with the Socialists, the PCF has turned to wooing leftist sects in a purely opportunistic manner. The PCF, which has for years violently denounced *autogestion* as a sociologist's scheme to get workers to submit willingly to austerity, is now posturing as the "party of *autogestion*" for the sake of a few votes.

A marked shift is also taking place in the PCF's attitude toward terrorism. The party's theoretical journal *Nouvelle Critique* last month featured an article defending West Germany's Baader-Meinhof terrorists as "democrats" persecuted by the Schmidt government. This anti-German note is an old saw that has repeatedly been used to undercut the formation of alliances with other continental European forces, on the basis of mutual interest, a backhanded way of criticizing the French government's supportive relationship with a "reactionary" power.

— Dana Kastner and Leigh Bristow