

What Kind Of 'National Unity' Government For France?

A factional battle has already begun over the formation of the next French government following the March 19 legislative elections which renewed the present majority coalition's mandate. At issue are two fundamentally opposed conceptions of "national unity."

In the second-round voting, the majority coalition composed of Gaullists and followers of President Giscard d'Estaing handily defeated the left electoral pact of Communists and Socialists.

President Giscard announced in a March 22 nationally televised speech that he will proceed with a series of consultations with the defeated parties of the "Union of the Left" and all the trade unions. The trade unions and party leaders have already accepted the invitation. Giscard announced that only after these consultations will he elaborate his future government's policy and composition, on the basis of some consensus he hopes will emerge for social reforms, to prepare for "a broad national unity."

Although there are no direct indications that President Giscard would attempt to change the basic foreign policy orientations of the Fifth Republic established by de Gaulle, the Gaullists, led by Gaullist party (RPR) President Jacques Chirac and former Prime Minister Michel Debré, are vehemently contesting his initiative as an attempt to return to the impotent Fourth Republic politics of "consultations." The Gaullists argue that instead the President, as the incarnation of national sovereignty, must first lay out a program for economic and energy development, as the urgent tasks facing the nation, around which to mobilize the population and obtain the cooperation of key political figures of stature across the spectrum of French politics.

Michel Debré, writing on the front page of the daily *Le Monde* March 23, stated "there is no future for the French if we do not put forward, in priority, the need for a strong currency, the necessity of a new thrust in favor of national energy sources, and a policy warmly favorable to savings and productive investment." Or, as Chirac bluntly put it, what the country needs is "great national reforms" (in the sense of the Gaullist "grand design"), not little "reformettes."

What the Gaullists suspect is that, left to himself and his coterie of Fabian advisers, Giscard will try to remove the Gaullists from effective power by instituting a new "center-left" government. The British and U.S. press especially has been clamoring for this for the past several weeks. At issue is no mere question of political "bossism," but whether France will remain a leading

industrial force committed to the development of national resources and industry, and to a policy of productive East-West detente, or whether it will flounder amid a myriad of calls for ecologism, zero-growth, decentralization and so forth as the basis for Giscard's "consensus."

The model for the latter form of government is explicitly a British one, as explained by Jean-Raymond Tournoux in an article in *Le Figaro* March 23, entitled "Giscard d'Estaing and 'the English card'," which reports that secret consultations have already been taking place.

These designs, however, pose major problems when placed in the context of the reality of politics. The Union for French Democracy (UDF), a coalition of parties including Giscard's Republicans, Lecanuet's Centrists and the Radical Party, formed as a tactical counterweight to the Gaullist RPR in the pre-election period, has a weak and untested political base. The Socialist Party, the linchpin in this entire plan, is threatened with major splits. Having built itself back up from the 5 percent of the electorate it commanded during the early 1960s on the basis of its alliance with the French Communist Party, the Socialist Party would shatter in factional chaos if it made any move in the direction of a Fourth Republic-type alliance with the UDF.

The Gaullists are gearing up for the battle ahead. The dismissal of RPR General Secretary Jean Monod from his post is symbolic of this. Monod, a proponent of decentralization and deindustrialization, will be replaced by Alain Devaquet, a professor at the Polytechnique, who is Chirac's advisor on energy problems and the man behind Chirac's strong pro-nuclear stand.

The policy orientation of the next government, the cabinet of which has not yet been formed, will to a large extent depend on the Gaullists' continuing their vigorous preelection campaign for industrial growth and energy development. The model for a positive national industry policy and the kind of political alliance needed to carry it out has already been set in Paris. Gaullist Party President and Mayor of Paris Chirac, Communist elected officials from the "Red belt" suburbs, municipal unions, and the Chambers of Commerce have collaborated in creating a "Fund for Industrial Investments." This new agency will attempt to reverse five years of deindustrialization, carried out by the decentralization agency known as DATAR under the guidance of its former head Monod, now eliminated from the RPR leadership.

—D. Sloan

U.S. And British Press Threaten France With Italian Terrorism . . .

Sunday Express, "Red Bombs Terror Looms Over France," London, March 19:

A bomb exploding under his car killed a French right-wing leader, François Duprat, and wounded his wife today following a threat by guerrillas of the Red Brigades to subject France to the terror which has plunged Italy into bloodshed and chaos....Immediately, the Government assigned squads of steel-helmeted and heavily armed police to guard the leaders of the three main political parties....The Red Brigades...made their threat to impose similar terror on France in a phone call to a Paris news agency...

New York Times, "France, Italy: Much is the Same, More is Different," by Flora Lewis, March 19:

...Prolonging the Fifth Republic's 20 years without transfer of power would still leave the question of how to break through the political barriers to reform...The Socialist leader, Gaston Deferre,...argued that Italy showed the dangers of waiting too long for reform. In such a case, he said, "the situation risks degeneration so badly that it is difficult to turn it around."...Some of the bulwarks which strengthen France against an Italian type of creeping paralysis are the very rigidities which the reformers want to bend...

...Set Communists Up For Confrontation...

Sunday Times, London, "French Unions Set For War" by Antony Terry, March 19:

The leaders of France's Communist -controlled trade unions were putting the finishing touches to their long-

term plans for causing industrial strife as a political weapon if the Socialist-Communist coalition fails to win a majority today. The country's most powerful trade union, the CGT, led by 50-year-old Georges Seguy, a militant member of the French Communists' Politburo intends to use all weapons up to a general strike...

Baltimore Sun, "Nibbling at the Nation's Institutions," guest editorial by Stanley Karnow, March 20:

The Communists...need not respect the parliamentary system if it ceases to suit their purposes. They can mobilize millions of militants to stage strikes, disrupt communications, provoke ferment in the schools and even subvert the government bureaucracy, many of whose officials share their views. The Communists dominate an impressive array of labor, youth, veteran and other so-called "mass" associations...The Communist movement here is a kind of subculture...

...And Urge Center-Left Alliance

Baltimore Sun, "Giscard is only clear winner in French elections," by Frederic Hill, March 21:

...The results confirmed the president's view that there is an emerging moderate majority in France that would like to hem in the constraining forces of Gaullism and communism and find the kind of social-democratic consensus common in most advanced Western European countries...Dependence on the Gaullist vote in the previous Assembly shackled Mr. Giscard d'Estaing...

New York Times, "French Elections: A Rebuff and Many Ambiguities," by Flora Lewis, March 21:

...There are unavowed common interests between Socialists and Giscardists in developing a center-left dominion which might push the other two parties to the impotent fringes. And there are common interests between the Communists and neo-Gaullists in maintaining the existing confrontation of blocs that leaves scant maneuvering room between them.