
INTERVIEW



Olivier Stirn on French policy

The following interview with Olivier Stirn was conducted by Christine Juarez of EIR's Paris bureau in late December. M. Stirn served as State Secretary for Foreign Affairs under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing for many years, functioning as a Deputy Foreign Minister. He is one of the handful of Giscard collaborators who has remained active since the election of François Mitterrand, writing many articles for various newspapers publications outlining his opposition to the policies and methods of the Socialist government. Olivier Stirn plans to create a social-democratic party in France, as he explains in the interview.

Juarez: Can you comment on François Mitterrand's foreign policy, in particular as far as the Middle East is concerned? Don't you think that Foreign Minister Cheysson's support for the Fahd plan, then his almost unconditional support for Israel as well as Libya, form something of an incoherent policy?

Stirn: First I would say that French policy today is not in all areas fundamentally different from yesterday. There is a certain continuity, notably in East-West relations and in French relations with the United States. . . . But you are right to bring up the Middle East, for this is one of the areas in which there is perhaps or there will perhaps be differences with the previous policy. There are none on principles, Mitterrand has recalled these principles: on the one hand, Israel must have safe and recognized borders, and on the other the Palestinians must be able to be organized and have their own homeland.

But you are right to bring up a certain number of contradictions. . . . I note in effect that there is a contradiction in wanting to support Libya on the one hand—which is one of the best-known enemies of Israel—and in wanting on the other to align oneself with Israel's positions to the extent of recognizing that the Camp David accords were excellent for the entire Middle East problem. This had not been the position of the Europeans

who, without condemning Camp David, considered that Camp David did not add very much, and at any rate did not solve the problem. There is also obviously a contradiction in wanting to say in the Arab countries, "We must have a Palestinian state, we must go very far in the recognition of the Palestinians and the PLO," and at the same time trying to support Israel's positions. . . .

• So President Mitterrand's policy is very harshly criticized by the Arabs, such as with [Foreign Minister Claude] Cheysson's recent statements in Israel, and at the same time Israel has no confidence, it seems, in some of Mitterrand's statements. Consequently there are at the present time many ambiguities, and no one really knows what is the real policy sought by the French government.

Juarez: Looking further at the Middle East, if there were a break between Israel and the United States, after Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, would France have a role to play, alongside England, vis-à-vis Israel?

Stirn: There could be a card to play, but we don't even know if Mitterrand will go through with the trip he is supposed to make to Israel in February, and so it's difficult for me to answer. As long as it's not clear what France wants, then it seems difficult for France to play a card. If France moves closer to Israel after this Golan affair then the Arabs will probably no longer give France's position any weight, so I don't see how France could play a mediating role. I think that if France departs from any of the main principles, which are recognition of Israel by the Arabs, within safe and recognized borders, and recognition of the necessity to find a homeland for the Palestinians—if France departs from these two principles, backing one to the detriment of the other, which seems to be the case, then the role she will be able to play will be weak.

Juarez: You said there was little change in France's East-West policy. But looking at the deterioration of East-West relations since the military takeover in Poland, we have to wonder if it is really the same policy, since Giscard knew how to be firm toward the East bloc, but also how to mediate East-West relations.

Stirn: I was referring to loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and the United States. Mitterrand has made a certain number of commitments in this respect, which show that there is no change and that loyalty to the Alliance and notably to the U.S. is a constant in French policy.

But you are right, France is losing her influence, the influence she exerted as a member of the Western alliance on the Eastern European countries. France is a European country, one of the countries which could have the ear of the East, and that could be useful for the West. She has lost that role, and it's true that in the Polish affair France's voice is heard by no one, is listened to by no one. That's absolutely certain.

Juarez: What do you think of the Polish events, and do you see a solution?

Stirn! I think that in these events in Poland we have to measure what can be done, and not just the feelings one has. The feelings we have are obviously of great solidarity for the Polish people, and a great sadness at seeing what had been won in terms of trade union liberties especially, be undermined. In this respect, feelings are unanimous, or almost. But reality, unfortunately, is not always a reflection of feelings. And reality is that we can't do everything.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that we could make the Soviets understand that there are limits which cannot be crossed without resulting in a certain number of serious sanctions, with serious consequences. For example, it could be indicated that if Solidarity's legal existence is not recognized, that if a certain number of union leaders are kept in prison, there would be a risk of calling into question cooperation with the Soviet Union and financial aid—I am not speaking of food aid. For just as it is normal to maintain food aid to a people which really needs it, it is abnormal to maintain financial aid to a state whose orientations one fundamentally disapproves of. We do not give low interest and financially advantageous loans to Chile or to countries whose dictatorial regime we disapprove of. I don't see why we should give such advantages to the Polish state, if it did not evolve. . . .

Juarez: When you worked under President Giscard, you were able to take part in his European policy, which was based on a Franco-German alliance. Now we are witnessing the creation of what some have called a new "entente cordiale" between France and England. What do you think of this development?

Stirn: No, I do not think this would suffice to make a strong Europe. In reality, we need a close entente between France and West Germany. This is a *sine qua non* for the existence of Europe. And I would regret it if this condition were undermined. It would be very serious for the strength of Europe. This does not prevent us from having good relations with the British. It is certain that Europe cannot be made with only two parties; it must be made with a group of countries who participate in it; there must not be any privileged parties. But we need a solid Franco-German entente which draws almost all the other European countries into uniting. . . .

Juarez: On the domestic side, do you think the time has come in which the Socialists can govern without the Communists, in other words, without the influence which the Communists have in a good part of organized labor in France? What are the possibilities for the creation of a center-left government in France?

Stirn: I don't think so. I don't think that Mitterrand wants to govern with the Center; I think he prefers to

reinforce his own party to the detriment of the Communists. He is not the loser in this respect, since the PCF is weakening, and when the PCF weakens, it is the Socialist Party that benefits. So I don't think he wants to change his strategy. . . . As for the Communists, they are so weak that to break out of the coalition now would isolate them completely and might contribute to accelerating their weakening. So I don't believe there will be a disruption of the current governing majority. . . .

Juarez: The Socialist Party had, I believe, a lot of sympathy for the British Social Democratic movement. So what would be the difference, in terms of ideas, between what the French Socialists want, the type of social-democracy you want to create, and West German Chancellor Schmidt's social-democracy?

Stirn: I don't think you can say that the PSF has much sympathy for the British Social Democrats. They are rather closer to the British Labourites. But what is true is that within the French Socialist Party there exists a social democratic current which has sympathies for the British Social Democrats, and which represent about 30 percent of the Communist Party. This is also true in the trade unions, in Force Ouvrière, and even in the CFDT [the two major, non-communist-dominated federations—ed.]. There is a social-democratic current, which for the time being votes socialist.

My concern is to create a big social-democratic party which, one day, will recover that 30 percent of the Socialist electorate, plus a certain number of currents from the present opposition.

And I think that this social-democratic ideal will be rather close to the German Social Democrats, except that there would be no left-wing faction as you have in the SPD, since that would be the Socialist Party. It will be the moderate tendency of the SPD. . . .

Juarez: What are your ideas on economic policy?

Stirn: I recognize that the market economy is necessary to economic development and therefore to social progress, but I would like to see very broad collaboration like you have in Germany, where comprehensive economic legislation is voted on each year after the agreement of the unions, business, and the government. From the company to the state level, I think we need a broad collaboration between all economic forces. This is one of the characteristics of social democracy . . . and one of the things that differentiates social democracy from socialism. Socialism is based on the class struggle, which begins from the standpoint that the classes must fight each other and that little by little the working class must eliminate the other class, whereas in social democracy we believe in collaboration of social categories and we want to build this collaboration with structures that would reach from the small company to the state.