

Chirac restarts nuclear tests to protect the 'higher interests' of France

by Christine Bierre

Barely over a month after being elected President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac announced solemnly, during a press conference on June 13, his sovereign decision to bring to an end the moratorium on French nuclear tests enacted by former President François Mitterrand in April 1992, and to restart a series on nuclear tests in the Pacific.

The President announced that the new series of tests would be limited to eight. They will start in September of this year and be concluded by May 1996, just in time to sign the new international treaty banning all nuclear tests, which France remains committed to signing. The tests are necessary to guarantee "the sureness, the security, and the viability of the deterrence upon which our defense and our independence is based," and for France to be able "to move toward the phase of laboratory simulation," he stated in justifying his decision. Chirac stated that his decision was "irrevocable" and taken after "much reflection and extensive consultations." "It is necessary" for the "higher interests of the nation," he said.

The announcement of his decision immediately provoked a massive uproar internationally, as could be expected. All the green and pacifist movements, headed up by Greenpeace, are mobilized in an attempt to force France to reverse its decision. The demonstrations in front of French consulates and embassies around the globe, the petition campaigns, and other such types of actions are, at this point, countless, according to press reports. The deployment of Greenpeace's ship *Rainbow Warrior* to the Mururoa Atoll in the Pacific where the tests are to take place, and its subsequent detaining by the French Navy, have catalyzed the support of a powerful international "pacifist" movement.

On the official level, similar to when President Charles de Gaulle said in July 1958 that France would carry out its first atomic tests in early 1960, the majority of France's allies have lined up against her. The United States characterized the French decision as "unfortunate," while Italy, Spain, the Benelux countries, Norway, Finland, and others have expressed their reprobation. In Germany, even though the initial position of the government was that this was "France's sovereign decision," pressure from the opposition parties has been so intense that Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Helmut Schaefer condemned the decision publicly, while Chancellor Helmut Kohl transmitted a message of regret to

President Chirac during their last Strasbourg summit. As could be expected, the British colonies in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand, have declared a crusade against the French tests.

Anglo-American inspired 'peaceniks'

What is really behind this uproar? Who are these peaceniks so deployed against the French tests? Just as when de Gaulle confirmed France's decision to develop its own independent nuclear deterrent, the so-called "pacifist" movements have been deployed internationally under orders of the Anglo-American "arms control lobby," not for the sake of "peace," but in order to maintain an Anglo-American monopoly over nuclear weapons and to stop any other country from possessing the bomb.

One look at the friends of Greenpeace confirms this analysis. Greenpeace's president in Great Britain is Peter Melchett, the grandson of Lord Melchett, founder of Imperial Chemical Industries. How is Greenpeace financed? The functioning credits for its fleet were raised at an art exhibit organized by the aristocratic Sotheby's in Zurich, Switzerland last January, under the heading of "Art for Our Planet."

To understand fully what the aims of the arms control lobby are, one must go back to Bertrand Russell and certain Anglo-American elites' justification for the bomb, as the ultimate weapon, to be in the possession of a "one-world government" dictatorship, capable of terrorizing the entire world into submission. It was to fight against such one-world dictatorship, operating at that time in an Anglo-American condominium with the Russians, that de Gaulle decided to build an independent nuclear force. This was at that time, and remains today, the very condition for France, or for any other nation in the world, to assert national sovereignty.

It is interesting to note to what extent Chirac's decision has provoked an uproar similar to that which met de Gaulle's, even though France today is already a nuclear power and Chirac's decision is only a continuation of what has been traditional French policy for more than 30 years.

Why the tests are necessary

Why are those tests really necessary today? The argument of many opponents that, because of the fall of communism, it is no longer necessary to continue the modernization of



French President Jacques Chirac is showing signs of independence from the "arms control lobby" and the anti-nuclear crowd.

nuclear forces, is ridiculous. The present massive economic crisis is the kind of context which has always led to war. Add to that the fact that Russia, the second world nuclear superpower, has suffered a humiliating political and economic setback under so-called shock therapy, and we have the ingredients for a new world conflict.

Are those tests necessary for the modernization of the French nuclear forces? The French government has indicated that it will not be testing new weapons, but only dealing with problems connected to the aging of the present systems which need replacement, and gathering data that will be used for a computer simulation model of tests. The French claim that they are far behind the United States in this latter respect and have to catch up. Some claim that once the simulation models are elaborated, there will be no need for further nuclear tests.

There is some speculation, however, over whether these are the only aims of the new series of tests. Can computer simulation replace actual testing? This seems unlikely. Even "peaceniks" such as the American Richard Garwin declared, according to the July 14 *Libération*, that "it would be irresponsible to put into place a sophisticated weapon without having tested it." The paper quoted engineer Laurent Barthélemy, assistant director of the Delegation of Strategic Affairs at the Defense Ministry, saying that "it is false to suggest that simulation could replace the tests," and that instead of

"simulation" one should rather talk about "modernization."

More important than these two official reasons for restarting the tests, is the necessary continuous evolution of weapons systems, as long as we remain in the nuclear age. Barthélemy addressed another crucial problem in this respect: "France and perhaps the Chinese are in a different position relative to other nuclear states. . . . France is currently developing the M 5 missile [which will replace all the submarine missiles] and had not yet chosen what its power will be. The United States and the United Kingdom have the Trident II; the Russians, the SSN 24, [and] therefore do not need a new weapon." In this context, scientists and military officials are also pressing the state to develop a miniaturized bomb in order to threaten weaker powers that nonetheless have nuclear weapons. These air-land, long-range missiles would allow for surgical strikes from several thousand kilometers.

These are the reasons why continued testing is necessary, and some expect that at the upcoming negotiations in 1996 to define the treaty that will ban all tests, the French will plead in favor of the continuation of miniaturization tests of less than 100 tons yield each. Already the eight tests which will be conducted in the Pacific are less than 150 kilotons. Tests under 100 tons do not even show up in a seismograph.

Politically important

The real importance of Chirac's decision to restart the tests, is political. The question is whether the French President will be able to renew a Gaullist policy of national independence vis-à-vis the financial elite which is presently ruling the world for the worse. Will Chirac break with the rules of the international game, run by a corrupted financial elite?

Regardless of all the limitations of the new President, there is definitely a potential that he will renew some of the better aspects of that Gaullist tradition. His statements against International Monetary Fund policies in the Third World; against financial speculation, for being the AIDS of the present monetary system; his fight to win the Presidency in favor of a renewed policy of social Gaullism, against the most aristocratic rule of his main contender Edouard Balladur, are signs that Chirac might just come out from under the control of those international circles defining the rules of the game. It is in this context that his decision to counter the international community on the question of the nuclear tests, to go against the international consensus defined by the arms control lobby, is extremely significant. If the President of France "bucks the system" in that respect, could he not also buck it in the Balkans and regarding matters of international financial policy?

Many have said that they would rather see more courage in the Balkans against Serbian genocide, than in the Pacific. Still, the courage in the Pacific could be crucial to developing the same kind of independence on issues which are perhaps more at the heart of the present crisis, such as the war in the Balkans.