

The new French cabinet: who gained

by Dana Sloan

French President François Mitterrand's Socialist Party (SP) won an overwhelming majority in the parliamentary elections at the end of June, giving the new president the means to pursue his objectives without need to bargain or negotiate on the level of inter-party politics.

While the American press has given front-page headlines to the appointment of four members of the Communist Party (PCF) to the cabinet, there is much greater reason for Western nations to be concerned with the appointment of Robert Badinter—a French equivalent of William Kunstler—to the sensitive post of justice minister. Mitterrand, with near-total power now in his hands, will accelerate the process he began shortly after his inauguration with a purge of several hundred intelligence agents and the prison release of more than 40 convicted terrorists.

If the Reagan administration is going to cut off the flow of sensitive intelligence to the French government, it should be for the right reasons: not because the PCF happens to be in the cabinet, presiding over its own annihilation, but because, from all appearances, the Mitterrand government has become terrorism's best friend in the West.

The appointment of Robert Badinter as minister of justice should properly become the focus of attention of France's allies. Along with Régis Debray's ascension to the Elysée as foreign policy adviser to Mitterrand, Badinter's presence in the cabinet confirms the government's intention to dismantle the antiterrorism cooperation laboriously assembled on an international and especially European-wide basis by the Giscard government.

A lawyer trained in part at Columbia University, Robert Badinter has intervened every time the previous administration undertook to keep its international anti-terrorism pledges. Badinter served as attorney for Klaus Croissant, a West German lawyer who defended Baader-Meinhof terrorists, was prosecuted as an accomplice of the gang, and was extradited from France in 1977. Freed from jail in December 1979, Croissant re-entered France shortly after Mitterrand's presidential election. Badinter has also served as defense attorney for Franco Piperno, Red Brigades leader extradited from France in 1978.

The Socialists did not receive a mandate for this

unleashing of terrorism. The opposition simply handed over a mass of sheeplike voters to Mitterrand—while an exceptionally high 25 percent abstained. The only thing comparable (in an inverted way) to the Socialist Party's victory in the parliamentary elections that ended June 21 is the massive swing behind Charles de Gaulle's UDR party in the parliamentary elections that followed the May 1968 student revolt, when the UDR won 297 seats. The Socialist Party and its tiny ally, the Left Radicals, won 285 seats, 169 more than they had in the previous National Assembly, which is composed of a total of 491 seats. Socialist gains were across the board, including areas previously considered impregnable. There is no longer a basis for talking about a conservative northern France and a socialist southern France: the Socialist Party made advances throughout the country. In the Seine Saint-Denis district, which has long been called the "red belt" suburb of Paris because the PCF has controlled the nine seats as long as anyone can remember, the SP took four of those seats.

Former President Giscard's UDF coalition lost nearly half its representation, dropping from 122 to 64 seats. The RPR, neo-Gaullist leader Jacques Chirac's party, lost 67 seats—the most forfeited by any of the losers—dropping to 151. The Communist Party went from 86 seats to 44, with party secretary Georges Marchais the only member of the Politburo left with a seat in the Assembly. That may soon be the only job he has.

The PCF was brought into the government after two days of negotiations, which resulted in the Communists committing themselves to "unfailing solidarity" with the new government. What this means is that the PCF, despite its large pro-growth union base, has swallowed the entire gamut of Socialist International policies, from disarmament to deindustrialization. In exchange for four cabinet posts (transportation, administrative reform, health, and professional training), the PCF will be asked to rein in the country's large labor confederation, the more than 4-million-member CGT, which it basically controls. This will particularly be the case in transportation, where strikes are expected this fall.