

Report from Paris by Joëlle Leconte

POE returns show vast potential

Their vote was small but impressive, since they ran in only 10 departments but received votes in 40.

Running in its first nationwide elections, the French Parti Ouvrier Européen, Lyndon LaRouche's co-thinker organization in France, received 17,684 votes for European parliament. Its program: No decoupling of Europe and the United States; European security based on neutron-bomb and beam-weapon deployments; and support for the Ibero-American "debtors' cartel" and a reorganization of the international monetary system.

The POE got only 0.08% for the whole of France, but its vote potential proved itself to be far greater. It spent a mere \$55,000 in a country where filing fees are exorbitant, sufficient only to place its name on 10 departments out of 95. Parties are requested to fund the printing of their own ballots, and it is estimated that to have run nationwide would have cost \$500,000-\$600,000.

Significant is the fact that some voters in other departments managed to get a POE ballot by their own means; not only did the party get between 800 and 3,000 votes in each of the 10 departments where it campaigned, but also surprisingly high votes in places where it did not. All-told, votes were cast for the POE in 40 departments.

The 17,000 votes in the 10 targeted departments amounted to 0.4% of the votes of those regions. The breakdown: Paris, 1,258 (0.18%); Paris far-suburbs Yvelines, 1,431 (0.35%), and Hauts-de-Seine, 1,302 (0.28%); Bouches-du-Rhone, which is the region of the industrial zone and port of Marseille, 897 (0.15); Rhone with the

large industrial and trade city of Lyons and its industrial suburbs, 1,294 (0.29); Loire-Atlantique, which includes the harbor of Nantes and the shipyards area including Saint-Nazaire, 805 (0.22%); Seine-Maritime, Normandy, with the industrial port of Le Havre and the agricultural areas around Rouen and Dieppe, 2,610 (0.61%).

Puy de Dome, whose large cities are Clermont-Ferrand, Le Puy, and Le Creusot in the central Auvergne mountains, was a big surprise with its 908 votes (0.4%), because the POE did not campaign there except for a three-minute TV interview, a radio interview, and an article in the local newspaper, *La Montagne* (which mentioned that the family of Jacques Cheminade, the head of the POE slate, comes from the area).

But the most striking was the vote for the POE in the northeastern region of Lorraine, one of the French steel-producing areas. Under the Socialist government's steel plan, the region will lose 20,000 jobs. The POE received 2,120 (0.92%) in Meurthe-et-Moselle, and 4,301 (1.35%) in Moselle. In addition, the party has been campaigning in Moselle, Metz, and Thionville in city council elections.

In other places where the POE had no ballots and no campaign except some press coverage, such as Var, a department on the Mediterranean coast, some 237 unexpected POE votes were cast; the two departments of Corsica recorded 40 votes, and Belgian-border northern departments of Nord

and Pas-de-Calais, the other heavy industrialized region of steel and coal whose main city is Lille, reported 141 POE votes.

In elections such as these, people tend to feel free to express their "feelings" through their votes, and are less worried about voting for a "winner" because they don't attach much importance to the European Parliament. They used these elections to express rage against existing institutions and policies. Not only did the extreme right-wing racist demagogue Jean-Marie Le Pen get 11% of the vote, but there were plenty of other ways to express discontent with eight or nine so-called "tiny slates," from the extreme-left to the so-called *poujadists*, the shopkeeper-populists.

What is striking is that in the midst of this wave of "rage voting" (close to 20% of the total), the POE supporters voted for ideas, for a programmatic solution to the strategic, economic, and financial crises. It was not a vote of protest, but a vote for a new defense of the Western alliance and a new monetary system.

The real outcome is a shift in perceptions of the population, that the POE is an established and growing political institution in France. Taking advantage of media coverage it received, including in the big Paris dailies, the party has embarked on an ambitious chapter-building campaign throughout France in preparation for the next round of elections. Most of its candidates have already declared themselves candidates for the March 1985 *Cantonales* (regional councils) elections.

Most interesting, Jacques Cheminade will challenge comeback-minded former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in Giscard's home town, Chamalières, for a National Assembly seat.