

Report from Paris by Laurent Rosenfeld

Shades of Edouard Daladier

Mitterrand's government is bankrupt, but it is being kind to say that his opposition has no de Gaulle in its ranks.

On Feb. 13, the French government announced that it was going to increase its contribution to the notorious United Nations Education, Science, and Culture Organization, to help make up for the U.S. withdrawal from that organization because of Unesco's systematic hostility to Western interests and support of Soviet propaganda efforts.

It was just another instance of the Mitterrand government's own recently displayed hostility to the Western alliance. On Jan. 28, Italian Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini accused the French of harboring international terrorists, a charge later repeated by Italian Premier Craxi. On Feb. 9, French Defense Minister Charles Hernu made a spectacle of himself at the Munich Wehrkunde (Military Strategy) meeting by parroting the pitiful arguments of Moscow against the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, which had just been heartily endorsed by West Germany's Chancellor Kohl.

Wishful thinkers might argue that this situation will fortunately not last too much longer, given that the Socialist Party has virtually no chance of winning the next general elections in spring 1986. True, President François Mitterrand has decided to change the polling system, which might make France altogether ungovernable should the Socialists fail to win. But it is more than likely that the nation's Gaullist opposition will return to power.

"Gaullist"?

The "Gaullist" opposition consists

in the main of three has-beens: former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his two former prime ministers, Jacques Chirac and Raymond Barre. Then, there is the extreme right-wing, racist anti-immigrant demagogue, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who, if he can pretend to no chance of victory, might be strong enough to function as a "spoiler."

So far, Raymond Barre is the front-runner. Barre is the candidate of the Swiss insurance companies. Although claiming to be a political heir of de Gaulle, he supports IMF "adjustment" policies which loot and destroy the Third World, and opposes technology transfer to developing nations. He also advocates an economic policy of ultra-monetarism à la Margaret Thatcher.

He opposes beam-weapon defenses, arguing that "ambitions to neutralize nuclear weapons" are unrealistic. But even worse, Raymond Barre criticizes François Mitterrand for "Atlanticism and anti-Sovietism"!

Two recent incidents are revealing. On Feb. 7, the historian and Communist Party member Philippe Robrieux said that Raymond Barre was Moscow's favorite candidate for the Elysée. This triggered a curiously strong reaction from pro-Barre Deputy François d'Aubert, who stated a day later, "It would be crazy to say that M. Barre is a red mole."

On Feb. 11, Jean Poperen, number-two in the Socialist Party, also attacked Barre's statement about Mit-

terrand's "Atlanticism."

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former President, is otherwise incapable of formulating any original policy—or for that matter, any policy at all. He takes firm stands on the pettiest of issues, but carefully avoids any important question.

Then, there is Paris Mayor Jacques Chirac, the head of a strong and well-organized political machine and chairman of the RPR, the Gaullist party. Although his party recently warned France against becoming technologically outmoded if it abstains from the SDI, Chirac can hardly claim the Gaullist legacy. At a recent meeting of the Club 89, the think tank of the RPR, one party leader stated, "Food aid [to the Third World] is by nature perverse." Club 89's program is otherwise an atrocious mix of monetarism, colonialism, and overt racism.

Personally, Jacques Chirac might not fully share in these views, but he has not had the moral courage to criticize them.

If Mitterrand's government is bankrupt, the opposition has nothing even approximating the "providential man," the de Gaulle whom the Mitterrand disaster makes essential.

In fact, the spectrum of French political leadership is behaving just as did the leaders of the Third Republic in the late 1930s, who ignored the pleas of de Gaulle, and failed to thwart the Nazi danger while there was still time. In their anxiousness to side with whomever seems to have the upper hand in international affairs, they remind one of Mussolini, who deserted his "Western alliance"—with France!—as the Nazis marched into Paris.

Far from de Gaulle in Paris, 1958, today's French opposition leaders, for all their petty disputes, strongly remind one of a different legacy, that of Edouard Daladier in Munich, 1938.