

Report from Paris by Mark Burdman

A small party's 'grand design'

The French political landscape is being changed by the Parti Ouvrier Européen, which evokes France's historical leadership.

As national legislative elections approach on March 16, one of the surprise factors that has emerged, is the role of France's Parti Ouvrier Européen (European Labor Party) in defining the policies a new French government would have to adopt, to reverse the profound economic, strategic, and cultural crises France is undergoing.

The POE, co-thinkers of U.S. presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche and headed by former French presidential candidate Jacques Cheminade, has secured a slate of candidates numbering between 100 and 125. The slate extends over at least 20 "departments" (the rough equivalent of American "states"), out of France's 95 departments. This candidate base will allow the POE, under French electoral law, to address the population on national television, on three occasions, for seven minutes each.

The POE's impact on the legislative elections, apparently out of proportion for a relatively new and small political party, is attributable to two factors.

First, it is expected that the Socialist Party will lose its majority in the 500-plus-member Chamber of Deputies. This will, almost certainly, produce the conditions whereby Socialist President François Mitterrand (whose presidency is not up for challenge in the current electoral round) will have to "cohabit" with a cabinet made up of opposition parties, mostly from the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR, or "Gaullists"), and

the Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). The new "opposition" government, necessarily, would seek a policy-package to distinguish itself from the five years of Socialist rule, especially in defense and strategic policies, and relations with the United States.

Second, the political situation in France is very volatile. Citizens are so angry, that polls show voting loyalties switching fast. In mid-January, there was even a pattern of reported voter swing-back toward the discredited Socialists. Otherwise, at least 50% of the voter base of Jean-Marie LePen's National Front party is purely a protest vote, with no special loyalty to LePen, but which rallies to his populist-style "spitting at the politicians," in the words of one Frenchman.

Thus, a party like the POE can win support from voters in all the main political parties, way beyond its apparent power in numbers. The core of the POE program is for France to rally around the kind of "Grand Design" that characterized France in its greatest moments, particularly under the 17th century's Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and revived, to a large extent, by Charles de Gaulle in this century. The "Grand Design" idea is based on a combination of government-directed, or *dirigist*, national economic policies, together with French mobilization for the rapid development of the Third World. This combination would provide the economic power-base for France to be able to attack a whole

range of threats, including terrorism, the drug traffic, and the spread of AIDS.

Such a "Grand Design" cuts through the prevailing insanity in France over the "immigrant question." National Front leader LePen and others play upon cheap racism in layers of the population, against immigrant workers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, while Fabian-Socialists and Communists, on the other hand, build up radical, fundamentalist, and other "countergangs" among immigrants. By its Colbertist policy, the POE gives the basis for a choice, by defining parameters for healthy growth, both in the French "metropole" and in the French-speaking areas around the world.

So explosive is this issue, that the POE created a shock in France when it dubbed its slate a "multi-racial" slate, composed of, among others, French African, French Muslim, and French Asian citizens.

The "Grand Design" policy also hits the Achilles Heel of many of the French oppositionists. The common position of most of the opposition, outside the Gaullists, is for "denationalizing" the Banque de France, and "privatizing" the French insurance system. For the cross-party formation behind former Prime Minister Raymond Barre, a pawn of the Venetian insurance interests, these two measures would be the first stages in a generalized "liberalization" of the French economy, reversing the economic dirigism that Charles de Gaulle made the core of his policies.

The POE's impact on this question is reflected in the fact that RPR industrial-policy spokesman, Michel Noir, stated, at the turn of the year, that the RPR would revert to a "Colbertiste" economic perspective, reversing an earlier position in favor of denationalizing the Banque de France.