

# French election is multi-media show

by Jean-Baptiste Blondel

Whatever the results of the first round of the French presidential elections on April 24, the most striking aspect of the campaign is the extent to which the electoral process has been "Americanized," transformed into a multi-media show. Strategic and economic problems have been taken over by advertising technicians, and replaced by wheeling and dealing among various factions as to the configuration of forces going into the second round.

Which does not mean there are no issues.

As of our press deadline on April 22, voters were expected to give the highest scores to President François Mitterrand and Premier Jacques Chirac, who would then face off in the second round on May 8. But no cautious observer was totally excluding a comeback by ex-Premier Raymond Barre in the last hours of the campaign.

**INF agreements:** President Mitterrand has accepted them "without reserve." During a visit to Ireland on Feb. 26, he stated, "I wish for a true, global, balanced, simultaneous, verifiable disarmament." He added that he does "not favor" modernization of the arsenal remaining in Europe. Some days later in Brussels, he proposed telling the Soviets, "Let's negotiate, let's begin negotiations on conventional weapons, let's reestablish a balance. If you refuse to do so, then we will modernize."

Mitterrand maintains that the French strategy of deterrence does not allow for any flexible response. Faced with a threat, "Our entire nuclear force, strategic and tactical, would be used . . . after one and only one warning." But Mitterrand's Socialist Party experts are demanding a reduction in the defense budget by scrapping the Hades program, Hades being a mobile land-based missile with a range of close to 500 km, which could be equipped with neutron bombs. If Mitterrand is reelected, French resistance to the INF agreements will lessen.

As for Chirac, he recommends these agreements be approached with "vigilance." He is trying to find some way to fill the gaps left by the dismantling of American nuclear forces, and backs an ambitious program for modernizing the French nuclear arsenal, especially through the Hades program, since this missile is the only one which could make up for the Warsaw Pact's conventional superiority. "We would no longer have to . . . launch the warning strike destined for the aggressor onto the territory of our friends," he said March 8, meaning Germany. France's defense is inseparable from

Germany's, he correctly insists. Chirac supports greater military cooperation between the two. Of course, pressure is also strong within his entourage to cut back spending for nuclear and conventional capabilities.

**European market:** The second point of debate is related to the first—the conception of Europe as it will be in 1992 with the opening of a "great European market." In this respect, the alliances being formed are far more telling. During a recent television interview with ex-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Carlo De Benedetti described the idea of a Marshall Plan for the Third World as absurd, and supported rather a Marshall Plan for the East bloc. Giscard in turn found this "very interesting." Now, De Benedetti is a notorious industrial "raider," and Giscard aspires to become President of Europe in 1992 and has co-authored a proposal for a European central bank.

Along these lines, Mitterrand has stated: "After all, it is also Europe on the other side . . . of the Iron Curtain. I am fully in favor of seeing Eureka, the great technological plan I proposed, solicited by Argentina, Canada, or the Soviet Union. . . . So, I could only support a plan . . . to strengthen or to reestablish links, activities, and trade between Eastern and Western Europe."

As for Raymond Barre, of the Trilateral Commission and Assicurazioni Generali, he has stated, "I see the time coming for an economic space covering Europe from East to West." Of Gorbachov's perestroika, he says, "It is in no European's interest that a great power of this continent be struck with hardships. Insofar as they are going in the direction wished for, the actions under way should not be hindered."

Some proponents of a Marshall Plan for the East claim it would be an excellent bulwark against communism. In fact, it is designed to facilitate Moscow's gobbling up of Europe in the wake of a U.S. pullout.

Jacques Chirac, of course, is pushing a Marshall Plan for the Third World—although he has avoided putting this forward during the campaign. In several interviews, he has mentioned his debt plan for the Third World, which includes a system for linking debt repayments to exchange rates or interest rates, and indexing repayment to the export revenues of the debtor country. "The measures of the IMF are technically understandable, but politically intolerable," he said.

So, beyond the political parties themselves, there are two factions: one, that of Barre and Mitterrand, oriented toward the East, and the other, in the Gaullist tradition, looking toward Africa and the South, while remaining aware of the threat from the East.

In order for Jacques Chirac to win the second round, and therefore the presidency of France, he will need to get all the votes of the extreme right National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the UDF, the center-right coalition which is supporting Barre in the first round. However, both of these formations have been known in the past to favor Mitterrand over a return to Gaullism.