

Chirac takes his policies straight to the French

by EIR's Paris Bureau

French President Jacques Chirac went on national television twice in early September to address French citizens about issues ranging from France's decision to resume nuclear testing and the shift to a military phase in Bosnia, to domestic social problems.

Chirac, who took office last May, has sharply shifted the strategic direction of his predecessor, François Mitterrand. As *EIR* previously reported, his moves to assert national sovereignty have earned a nasty response from the British oligarchy, even including veiled death-threats. Now he appears to be taking a leaf from the book of the Fifth Republic's founder, Charles de Gaulle, whose radio addresses to directly mobilize the French people were famous.

Chirac was interviewed for 50 minutes on Sept. 5 on the national TV channel, France 2; and again for an hour on Sept. 11 by Anne Sinclair, a popular journalist and sympathizer of Socialist leader Lionel Jospin, Chirac's rival in the presidential election last spring.

Education reforms

In his Sept. 5 interview, he began with the issue which is the most sensitive to the French: the quality of education. The President announced that he was tripling a "back to school" grant to families which helps pay for notebooks, books, pens, clothes, etc. Then he announced measures aimed at improving the equality of opportunity for impoverished students, including State pay incentives for good teachers to teach in the poor suburbs.

He announced that the numbers of students per class will be reduced, and confirmed his government's commitment to measures initiated by François Bayrou, who served in the former Balladur government. Some 100,000 schoolchildren will start learning foreign languages at age 7, which is a far-reaching innovation for the French. For next year, Chirac announced that the musical education programs would be upgraded as well, as part of a program to remedy a national deficiency in foreign languages.

Chirac blamed the media for creating a "psychosis" around terrorism, and praised the national police forces for their efforts to investigate all possible tracks in the wave of lethal bombings that began last June.

Responding to criticism that not enough police efforts were deployed soon enough, Chirac said that, on the contrary, police efforts were increased as the terrorists increased

their own pressure on the State. With the deployment on Sept. 7 of the "Vigipirate" plan, which will allow 4,000 Army troops to relieve police in fixed surveillance posts to allow them to join the field, the police will have been deployed to their full capacity. Chirac acknowledged problems of rivalry that broke out among the different police and intelligence units dealing with the terrorism wave. "We will not win this war against those terrorists unless there is perfect harmony, a perfect coherence of our action," he said. To increase the pressure on the police, Chirac announced that when the war is over he will definitely take into account all the different attitudes which predominated during the war.

Policy not based on polls

He also announced that the French nuclear tests in Mururoa would be secret and would be filmed by the French Army, which would make the film available to media immediately afterward, in this domain where the greatest "irrationality" and "media campaigns" prevail.

Chirac stated several times during the Sept. 11 interview that he had "neither overestimated, nor underestimated" the response to France's decision to renew nuclear weapons tests, because this was a matter of "the security of France." Adopting a Gaullist-style posture of statesmanship, Chirac affirmed, "This decision could not be taken according to polls or foreign reactions, whether emotional, or nourished by hostility against our country." But he added that France would not use these tests to develop new miniature charges for theater nuclear weapons, which he called "dangerous."

Finally, concerning the Pacific countries attacking France, Chirac said that if need be, France would retaliate. For instance, France could break the contract by which France buys 3% of its uranium needs from Australia. Uranium sales to the French amount for 10% of Australia's exports. In the present contract which goes to the year 2000, the uranium is evaluated at \$40,000 per ton, while present market prices are under \$24,000.

The weakest facet of Chirac's message concerned economic policy. Just before the Sept. 5 interview, Chirac's prime minister, Alain Juppé, had created a massive uproar in the unions by telling them that he was "freezing" increases of civil servants wages in 1996. Chirac justified this choice by France's indebtedness and big public deficit, which are killing the economy by keeping interest rates high. The government chose not to fire civil servants, as the recently dismissed Economics Minister Alain Madelin had demanded, but cannot pay wage hikes because of other "priorities" in the economy, such as helping the unemployed, the homeless, etc. Juppé also announced that he would not be giving the unemployment insurance fund 12 billion francs which had been promised a couple of years ago when the fund was in the red. These issues would create no problem in the context of a plan to relaunch industrial investment. However, at this point, there is no such plan.