

French seek support for 'Marshall Plan'

by Yves Messer

The French government has launched a new offensive on behalf of its "Marshall Plan" to save Third World countries from starvation (see *EIR*, April 10, 1987). Since French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac was convinced by his agriculture minister, François Guillaume, of the necessity of helping starving countries around the world, the French government has been trying to take the leadership of industrialized nations in this project.

The principle of this Marshall Plan is much the same as the original American aid plan for war-devastated Europe in 1947. It aims first to extend emergency aid to starving countries with food surpluses, chiefly coming from Western countries; and second, to finance technology transfers with the profits generated from a stabilized price policy. The slogan is "bread and tractors" for the Third World.

The first public moves were made in March-April this year when Chirac visited the United States and openly criticized the International Monetary Fund, and when Guillaume met with Pope John Paul II, who supported his proposal. This diplomatic offensive was made possible after the release in January of the Pontifical "Justitia et Pax" Commission's study on world indebtedness, which condemned the usury of the international banks.

A new offensive was opened by Chirac and François Guillaume in August. First, Chirac gave a speech Aug. 31 in Montreal, where he held blamed certain private and international institutions for the "dramatic" situation of certain Third World countries. Before an audience of Quebec businessmen, the French prime minister denounced the "disengagement of private banks from developing countries and the selfishness of certain superpowers, namely Japan and the United States."

"The industrialized countries," he added, "have the moral, economic, but also political duty to provide a response to the problems the Third World is facing." Chirac criticized also the "technocrats" policy, a pointed barb against the European Community Commission in Brussels. This last attack was not part of his written speech, but added spontaneously by Chirac.

Guillaume in Africa

In tandem, Guillaume is touring Third World countries seeking international support. He is slated to visit the United States before the end of this year and expects to need new

"arguments" in his suitcase to convince the American bureaucrats. The first leg of his tour took him to the African countries of Ivory Coast, Mali, and Chad. On Aug. 25, he met the "wise man of Africa," Ivory Coast President M. Félix Houphouët-Boigny. "The Americans know quite well," warned Guillaume in Abidjan, that Ivory Coast and its President are stabilizing elements in Africa. "Therefore they will be affected by Mr. Houphouët-Boigny's position."

Guillaume continued: "I came here in order to ask for your support. Your moral authority among political officials will permit us to more effectively help developing nations which are starving." The African President commented: "What is desirable is necessarily what is possible. Therefore I hope that donor-countries will rapidly follow this proposal. But my role in the implementation of this plan is purely a moral one, because I don't have means."

Guillaume met also with his Ivory Coast counterpart, Bra Kanon, with whom he concluded an aid contract for France to build a new National Agricultural High School in Yamassoukro city. France will donate some 2.6 million francs toward this project. Guillaume stated that "Mr. Chirac intervened recently with the World Bank to support your request for financing." During his visit, Guillaume also studied the need for a relatively advanced country like Ivory Coast to have the capability to process its own agricultural products. For this purpose, France will send a delegation of technical experts to Ivory Coast.

In Mali, the Guillaume proposal was likewise endorsed, as this country is one of the most stricken by the Sahel drought. The Malian minister of agriculture commented, "François Guillaume's approach is humanitarian and political." France proposed to play an intermediary role in South-South trade, and agreed, for instance, to buy 4,500 tons of Mali surplus and give them to Mauritania whose population is suffering starvation.

In Chad, the French agriculture minister met on Aug. 28, with President Hissène Habré, who is embroiled in an effort to kick Qaddafi out of his country.

Because of Chad's enormous economic investment in military efforts, the idea of a new Marshall Plan was well received. This country has great economic potential, not only for itself but for the development of all the countries of the Lake Chad basin, and for Africa in general. Chad has also been hit by drought in its northern part located in the Sahel belt, while its southern part often has surplus production. France agreed, as in the Mali case, to buy 2,000 tons of grain from the south and sell it to the north. The proceeds of this operation will be invested to foster farming there.

After this African tour, on Sept. 11-18, Guillaume plans to visit Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Thailand, and Japan. These countries' backing of the French proposal will be an important factor at the Sept. 21 meeting of the European Community agriculture ministers, where the "Marshall Plan" is to be debated.