

# Tonton the Florentine takes France back to the Fourth Republic

by Webster G. Tarpley

Oct. 4 marked the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of Gen. Charles de Gaulle's Fifth Republic Constitution, a system of government which allowed de Gaulle's presidency to assume worldwide strategic importance in the advancement of national sovereignty and economic development. Even after de Gaulle himself had departed the scene, the institutions he had wrought lived on, and were at least in part successful in making lesser men like Georges Pompidou and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing bigger and better than they otherwise would have been. But now, after François Mitterrand has completed his first seven-year term in office, and has been reelected this past May to serve a second such term, if one asks Parisian political observers what remains of the grandeur, dignity, and inspiration of the Fifth Republic, they will promptly answer: "Nothing."

In the decisive sectors of her national affairs, France has reverted to the mediocrity and impotence of the Fourth Republic, to a parliamentary soap opera of government crises, early elections, contemptibly weak coalition governments, and no world strategic role whatsoever. As Maurice Duverger told *Le Figaro*, "the politicians, after the elections, took up the political language of the Fourth Republic again, as if they were feeling nostalgic for a time which was, for them, much more amusing." For his latest book, pundit Duverger has coined the phrase "the nostalgia of impotence," a reference to Mitterrand's return to pre-1958 parliamentary scheming. The word is out in Paris that "the age of heroes is over," not just in France but worldwide. The one country in Europe where the idea of the sovereign nation-state had been revered is now, under Mitterrand, taking a leading and instigating role in imposing the "Europe 1992" lockstep on the continent.

So in France, too, the postwar order, in this case the one founded on Gaullist institutions, lurches toward a pathetic collapse.

Five months after the presidential elections that mandated seven more years of Mitterrand, the French were called to the polls for cantonal (county) elections, whose purpose is to choose provincial administrators. Despite some predictions of a further rout of the Gaullist RPR, which had been led to defeat earlier this year by the hapless mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, there were no dramatic shifts in votes compared with previous elections, but: over 50% of those having the right to vote did not choose to do so—the largest abstention in the

history of France, pointing to an unprecedented level of disgust with the political class as a whole. Even Jean-Marie LePen, whose Vichy style and racist demagoguery had made him the surprise of the May presidential contest, saw his National Front sink below 5% of the votes.

The other interesting aspect of the cantonal elections was a series of local breakthroughs by the Parti Ouvrier Européen (European Labor Party, or POE), led by the most promising young statesman in French politics, Jacques Cheminade.

Presiding over the ruin of France is of course President Mitterrand, now almost universally referred to by his nickname of "Tonton," which is what French children like to call their favorite uncle. The presidential elections were dominated by what the political scribblers call "Tontonmania." Tonton is considered a master of intrigue, a ceaseless and successful architect of plots and conspiracies. His other nickname is "the Florentine," a reference to the vulgar Machiavellianism and manipulation which he practices.

Tonton, tormented by his inner void, wants attention and glory, both now and in the history books to come. His administration boasts no accomplishments, but has rather been characterized by that relentless decline on all fronts that is now accelerating. How, then, can Tonton be popular? He tries to do it by being at the center of a prurient and futile political soap opera. Parisian *salons* buzz with gossip about what subtle maneuver Tonton is now cooking up "to get revenge" against a real or imagined insult by an associate or rival. Then the conversation turns to the name of Tonton's latest mistress and the reactions of her wealthy family.

During two years of so-called "co-habitation" with Gaullist Prime Minister Chirac, Tonton developed a technique called *le schmiliblic*. This meant that anything that went wrong in France was Chirac's fault, and that anything that went well was credited to Tonton. Now *Le Point* and other journals are filled with soap opera accounts of the plots Tonton is hatching against his own newly appointed Socialist prime minister, Michel Rocard. *Le Monde*, now degraded to a mere mouthpiece of the Socialist regime, writes of Rocard that "The French like him." Tonton's antennae go up. In the Fifth Republic, every prime minister has been dumped to enhance the President's political fortunes. Rocard thinks he can last for 2,000 days, positioning himself to become President in 1995. Tonton begins to spin his web, Cabinet ministers who don't get along with Rocard are invited more frequently to

Tonton's Elysée Palace. Tonton "doesn't like Rocard," asserts one such cabinet member.

In order to get reelected, Tonton assembled a group of perception-mongers and image-shapers including long-time adviser Jacques Attali, former Culture Minister Jack Lang, and one M. Berger from the designer house of Yves St. Laurent. The resulting concoction clearly owes something to Ronald Reagan's 1980-84 profile, but is also adapted to French ideology.

Tonton takes care to appear as a moderate and affable sage, who is not really a socialist, certainly not a right-winger, and who really is not part of politics. Rather, he likes to read books and take long walks, when he is not visiting his mistresses. Presidential speeches offer a series of images upon which fantasies can be hung—never too serious and political. Chirac, after all, was very serious and very political, and look where it got him. Is there a new outbreak of the persistent rumors about Tonton's failing health, this time focusing on a prostate cancer that should do him in within one to two years? Tonton knows what to do: His cut-outs circulate a counter-rumor that Chirac has just been diagnosed with liver cancer and is also not long for this world.

Young people now in their twenties say that they like Tonton because he is clever and flexible. "He knows how to change," said one. Chirac, by contrast, was judged to rigid, and is not liked. "Chirac, he never changes," say the kids. Tonton is often described as an anti-hero, a little man who knows how to make people feel comfortable. On the day he announced his presidential bid, he told a group of none-too-friendly journalists that he had spent the day "reading an old book." Chirac tried to ridicule the Tonton image, but had no policy differences to differentiate himself from the incumbent.

## Nostalgia for Vichy

The fantasy world Tonton offers the French is the never-never land of "Happy France," situated between about July 1940 and December 1942, exactly the time when Tonton was an official of Marshal Pétain's Vichy regime, a puppet state of Nazi Germany. Tonton's favorite writer is the previously obscure Jacques Chardonne, one of whose novels reflects nostalgia for Vichy with the singular motivation that it was easier to seduce women when most of the men were away at war or in the concentration camps.

At the same time, it is clear that Tonton has never gotten over the central experience of his life, the fight against de Gaulle, which he could never win as long as the General was alive. Tonton remains obsessed with his own world-historical inferiority. If, at the Elysée, a visitor unwisely praises de Gaulle, Tonton clenches his fists and grits his teeth in rage and envy.

The reasons why this technique could get Tonton reelected relate to his foreign support, mainly from the United States and Great Britain. Tonton is a State Department So-

cialist with decades of collaboration with the CIA. Just as the CIA has supported Socialist International figures like Willy Brandt and Bettino Craxi against their patriotic and nationalist countrymen, so, too, in France—and more so, since here it was a question of undermining de Gaulle, who challenged the U.S. Eastern Liberal Establishment worldwide, for a time at least. The State Department, CIA, and London provided considerable direct support for Tonton. Then there was indirect support, largely expressed through CIA funding of the racist clown LePen.

In the second round of the presidential elections, Chirac was caught in the following bind: If he dealt with LePen to gain his support, he would lose the centrist-liberal votes controlled by Raymond Barre, a spokesman for powerful international financial interests. If he deferred to Barre, he would alienate LePen's enthusiasts. Chirac characteristically chose a middle path which alienated both groups, thus guaranteeing his own resounding defeat. Tonton could rub his hands in glee: His exquisite stratagem had worked like a charm—with the help of some CIA financing for LePen. Now, since LePen's function has been exhausted, Tonton is making sure that he is rapidly deflated, while the CIA cuts off its financing to the National Front.

Chirac never had a chance. Chirac's credentials were concentrated in two points which he understood rather well: first, that Muslim fundamentalism is a catastrophe for the Western world; second, that extortion of debt payments from the Third World must be replaced by the kind of "New Marshal Plan" approach exemplified by his agriculture minister, François Guillaume. But, back in 1982, when Chirac and the RPR were synthesizing an economic policy to campaign on, they failed to choose one that could provide an alternative to Tonton. At that time, Chirac's advisers carefully studied the neo-Colbertist and dirigist economic views of LaRouche and Cheminade, but rejected these in favor of free-market liberalism, partly in the fatuous hope of buying support from the Reagan administration's legions of greed by doing so. As prime minister, Chirac went so far as to encourage foreign corporate raiders to take over and cannibalize French companies under a program called OPA. The RPR liberals like Balladur, Toubon, and Jupp, responsible for these decisions made sure Chirac would henceforth be a loser.

Tonton was also firmly preferred by the French national establishment, which is dominated by Protestant banking families, whose true loyalties belong to Geneva and to Swiss-based international cartels like Nestlé. These are people like Antoine Riboud, who controls the Paris left-wing daily *Libération*, like Nicholas Seydoux, like the interests linked to Hersant, Bouygues, Mallet, Schlumberger, and Banque de Suez. These are the people who control the Fondation St. Simon and other influential think-tanks. This is the kind of milieu Michel Rocard comes out of, although Rocard's outlook may have been ameliorated by his father, who was a part of de Gaulle's nationalist project of building the French

atomic deterrent, the *force de frappe*. The elder Rocard was reportedly shocked when his son joined the 1968 contestation.

The result: The regime plays the script of the Fourth Republic, with the key roles filled by graduates of the May 1968 destabilizations. Paris bookstands display a study by François Furet, Jacques Julliard, and Pierre Rosanvallon entitled *La république du centre*, (*The Republic of the Center*), which carries the subtitle "The End of the French Exception." This subtitle exactly sums up what Tonton and his financier backers think they are doing: They wish to obliterate the exceptional French tradition of the strong nation-state, and flatten the country back into conformity with the weak states of Western Europe in the context of the 1992 Single Market Act. Tonton and Rocard are in the process of cutting key categories of French defense, including the land-based missiles and submarines which compose the *force de frappe*. France is losing out increasingly to British arms merchants in vital Third World markets, including the Middle East.

One reason why British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher may be criticizing the single market, suggest Paris observers, is that the theme of empire is again being sounded in London, which now ranks second only to the U.S.A. on the list of world arms exporters. The possibility of a French national policy on grand strategy, international economics and finance, as well as key regional issues is more and more foreclosed. If de Gaulle were alive today, he would be fighting the U.S.-U.S.S.R. New Yalta imperialist condominium and related power-sharing agreements. Tonton is happily subservient to those agreements. De Gaulle, if alive today, would be busily erecting defenses to save France from the imminent second crash of the world financial markets. He would be fighting for a New World Economic Order, for debt relief in the Third World. Mitterrand does no such thing, but rather connives to make each of these situations worse.

### POE candidates movement

But all of these causes are alive in France today, thanks to the work of Cheminade and his European Labor Party. In his office in Clichy, Cheminade sums up the signal successes scored by the POE candidates movement in certain localities in the cantonal vote. Back in July 1984, a *Paris Match* magazine poll of voters and non-voters had given the POE a nationwide base of 1.5%. Now, one POE candidate has received 5.9%, ten did better than 2.5%, and 30 garnered over 1%. In the framework of the proportional system used in France in certain kinds of elections, it is clear that Cheminade has built a solid base for further advances in the June 1989 European Parliament elections. A pro-Dukakis clique in the French administration has obviously come to the same conclusion: Police and officials of the Renseignements Généraux, a parallel to the U.S. FBI, ran amok in Lyons and elsewhere, contacting POE citizen-candidates to intimidate them with absurd and illegal threats. It was an action, the

POE notes, which ought to bring down the Rocard government for violating French law in the service of foreign interests hostile to France.

*Le Figaro* listed the POE results in the cantonal elections under the heading "EXD" or *extrême-droite* (extreme right). The label is absurd. Some years ago Bernard Brigouleix was nearer to the mark when he wrote in *Le Monde* that Cheminade could only be classed as a "Free French left Gaullist." Cheminade tells his audiences that the POE supports "the France of Jean Jaurès, of Louis Pasteur, and of General de Gaulle." The result is lively interest, punctuated by Cartesian-pedantic explosions that "They're not the same!"

Jaurès was a patriot of the French Socialist Party working class movement who was assassinated at the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Cheminade explains that while he has disagreements with each of the three, including de Gaulle, the common lesson that they can teach the France of today is that "we need people who can say no to the logic of institutions when the hour has come to fight for the integrity of values and ideas, who will fight, if need be, against the institutions in the name of the values."

Tontonmania will be dispersed by the world financial panic of the next few months. At that point it will become clear that if France is to have a future, it will be one that prominently features Cheminade and his friends.

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