

# France in retreat after 1988 elections

by Christine Schier

A few weeks ago, the widely read daily *France Soir* carried a picture of Prime Minister Michel Rocard sitting in the cockpit of a fighter plane dressed in pilot uniform, with the ironic comment: "In spite of appearances, there is a pilot." The remark captures rather well the prevailing mood in France since the presidential elections of last May which saw François Mitterrand reelected with a very comfortable margin. His Socialist government is weak and undecided and, though pilot there may be, he has set no national course.

One can argue that the previous "cohabitation" government of Socialist President Mitterrand and Gaullist Premier Jacques Chirac was no bastion of institutional strength, either; the very fact of cohabitation meant a weakening of the institutions set up by Charles de Gaulle, under the Fifth Republic. But now, the Fifth Republic is about to be dealt the death blow, while various financial vultures and private interests gather round to snatch up what power they can from the carcass.

Nowhere is this weakness more blatant than in the social realm. The communist-led trade union, the CGT, has been leading strikes in the public sector over the past few months, whose aim is not labor benefits, but the destabilization of the state itself. The "guerrilla-style" strikes are attempting to disorganize three key branches of the economy: transportation, communications, and energy, and to do so with relatively very few workers in crucial positions, such as maintenance of the subway or operating the national power grid. This is a specific sort of irregular warfare which, so far, the government has been unable, or unwilling, to resist. Faced with such impotence, the French are growing ever more cynical. Although the Communist Party and various Trotskyist elements are instrumental in leading the strikes, the movement would never succeed were it not for the complicity and the manipulation of the "leftists" in the Socialist Party, like Laurent Fabius and Lionel Jospin, who oppose the "social-democratic centrist" Michel Rocard.

The weakening of the centralized state fits in perfectly with the Single European Act of 1992, which aims, from a different level, at taking power and sovereignty away from the nation-state to confer them on financial giants and bureaucracies. It is tragic, that in the fatherland of de Gaulle, who fought tooth and nail against a supranational Europe, no major politician of any stripe has denounced Europe 1992. Quite the contrary. For François Mitterrand, who bitterly opposed and envied the General during his lifetime, such a position is not surprising. Likewise for Michel Rocard, who

prides himself on being a disciple of de Gaulle's most fervent opponent, Jean Monnet. Their government has already opened up the French economy to international raiders, linked both to the Socialists and to Trilateral Commission member and Prime Minister hopeful Raymond Barre.

But even among the nominal "Gaullists"—heirs in name only of the general—there is no opposition to 1992. They rather claim to be the most "Europeanist" of all. The RPR has not yet gotten over its stinging defeat in the presidential elections, followed by a setback one month later in the legislative elections. The strong points of the Chirac government had been its commitment to fighting international terrorism and to modernizing national defense, while opposing the sell-out of Europe implied by the New Yalta deals between Washington and Moscow. It proposed a "Marshall Plan" for the Third World, known as the "Guillaume Plan" after the agriculture minister, which could have countered the International Monetary Fund-directed genocide in Africa. But Chirac never gave substance to the plan, which quickly fell into oblivion.

On all these points, the Rocard government has taken a contrary stance. It has moved to cut back defense programs and personnel, particularly in those advanced fields of research which have been a must in French defense policy since de Gaulle. Here again, the need for austerity is invoked to soften the shock of the cutbacks. Somewhat belatedly, François Mitterrand has begun a charm offensive of his own toward the East bloc, with a myriad of state visits, economic offers, and utterances about the "European common house." He is racing to catch up with his West European neighbors, no doubt to avoid being left in the antechamber of the new house.

As for anti-terrorism, one example should suffice to illustrate the in-depth attack launched against judicial and law enforcement institutions, under the direction of the Justice Minister Pierre Arpaillange. In November, a member of the special committee of magistrates set up by the Chirac government to investigate and try terrorists, Judge Boulouque, was indicted under an obviously faked charge of having leaked information to the press. This judge was in charge of the "Gordji case," which had led to a break in French-Iranian relations.

The Rocard government is fragile and increasingly under attack, as the guerrilla movement launched from within intersects the offensive of a supranational Europe 1992 and a New Yalta from without. Raymond Barre certainly considers himself the man who could best step in to preside over the fall of the Fifth Republic, with the blessings of the international financial establishment. The only political force in the country which defends the institutions of the Fifth Republic and a grand design for France in the world is the small but growing Parti ouvrier européen, led by Jacques Cheminade and associated with the international movement of Lyndon LaRouche.