
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Conservative 'unity' helps Mitterrand

Beginning June 14, France will go through a new round of elections which threaten to be as disastrous for the French nation as the ones that brought Socialist François Mitterrand into power.

Irrespective of who comes out on top, President Mitterrand's decision to dissolve the National Assembly and hold new elections on June 14 and June 21 itself makes a mockery of the constitution of the Fifth Republic, which holds that the president rules over and above the political parties and coalitions. Mitterrand's decision to reshuffle the deck in an attempt to come up with a majority in the National Assembly brings France dangerously close to the Italian model, where every few months a new prime minister is appointed who attempts to shape a cabinet based on some formulation of a majority in the assembly.

Keeping that in mind, there are several possible outcomes of these elections, each entailing various degrees of instability or chaos.

In the present National Assembly, which is composed of a total of 491 seats, Jacques Chirac's RPR has 155 seats; former President Giscard's coalition group, the UDF, has 119 seats; the Socialists 117; and the French Communist Party 86. While the Socialist Party is expected to gain significantly, it will not have enough seats on its own to have a majority. It will therefore have to work out an alliance with either the Communists, Chirac's group and possibly even a few defectors from the UDF—a rather loose coalition previously held together by the fact that Giscard was in power

'Union for a New Majority'

Immediately after Mitterrand's presidential victory, when it was known he would dissolve the National Assembly, Jacques Chirac—whose break with Giscard swung the election over to the Socialists—announced that it was time for the RPR and UDF to bury the hatchet and run joint candidates to bolster their support for the legislative elections to come. Members of the

UDF have swallowed this, through many privately confide that even from the technical electoral standpoint they know it is suicidal.

To put the plan into effect, Chirac and leaders of the UDF got together and drew up a list of 300 joint candidates who will run under the banner of the Union for a New Majority (UNM). Only a small part of the UDF, mainly centered in the small Republican Party of Giscard, has not jumped ship. Those who have deserted have done so in the foolish belief that this will save their skin in the elections and that the up-and-coming political leader to follow is Chirac. UDF president Roger Chinaud stated in May 26 radio interview, "We have returned to the Fourth Republic," but is proceeding with the "new majority" deal.

But as one of the UDF leaders who took part in the negotiations with the RPR told the weekly *Le Point* on May 25: "We didn't have a choice. The RPR, which is in a position of strength, didn't give us any presents. And we are going to lose. But Chirac's objective is not to win. His objective is simply to have a group of deputies in the National Assembly that is larger than ours."

From that standpoint, Chirac expects to be in a position to either cut a deal with Mitterrand, or to set himself up as the leader of the conservative opposition, preparing the conditions for chaos and emerging out of the wreckage as a man-on-a-white-horse alternative to Socialist rule.

The PCF's options

If he had any other choice, Mitterrand would rather not form a coalition including the Communist Party. The Socialists have therefore already put out the preconditions for allowing Communists into the government: the PCF must drop its support for the development of the nuclear program, denounce the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, agree to the deployment of NATO's Euromissiles in Western Europe—conditions the PCF cannot be expected to meet unless it chooses to self-destruct. Hatred for Mitterrand runs deep in the PCF's ranks. Despite the fact that he was elected with their votes, if the new president does not play ball with the PCF, they are ready to throw whatever they have against him, including France's largest labor union, the CGT.

Former President Giscard, having just been abandoned by the greater part of the UDF, has for the time being gone into seclusion. Groups of Giscardian loyalists have refused to take part in Chirac's Union for a New Majority, but their prospects for re-election are not uniformly good.

Barring some dramatic development to shift the situation in France, the fate of the Fifth Republic rests in the hands of its worst enemies.