
FRANCE

Mitterrand's first government crisis

by Philip Golub

In announcing late last month that the French national assembly will be asked to grant the Mauroy government exceptional powers, François Mitterrand's Socialists made one further large step toward the alienation of democratic republican civil rights in France.

The week of Dec. 7-11, the Socialist-controlled parliament will abdicate its legislative powers to the government, which henceforth will rule by decree on all matters concerning social, labor, and economic policy. Even though the use of Article 38 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic is formally legal, previous governments of the Fifth Republic have invoked the act only under exceptional conditions of parliamentary paralysis, such as in 1967 under de Gaulle.

Given that François Mitterrand's Socialists possess an overwhelming majority in the Parliament, it is all the more astonishing that the government should invoke measures originally designed to correct continuous confrontations between the parliament and the executive. The Socialists may deviously argue that the measure is designed to quicken the pace of change and veto the upper house's opposition, but the measure is unquestionably an assault on the very principles of parliamentary democracy so long touted by the author of *Le Coup d'Etat Permanent*.

Why dissolve a parliament or emasculate it when it is little more than a rubber-stamping institution of the presidency? Where is the crisis which has provoked this disproportionate, frantic reaction?

Is the aim to impose silence on the opposition in parliament? Yes, in part. It is a first step in an attempt to destroy the Senate? Yes, of course, yet much more is at stake. A mere six months after assuming power, the Mitterrand regime is in a crisis.

The crisis is not so much the doing of the opposition, although striking results have been obtained in the Senate, which is still dominated by the UDF (Union pour la Démocratie Française)—RPR (Rassemblement pour la République) coalition, such as the Senate's successful

resistance to the nationalization plan of the government.

At bottom lies an astonishing level of incompetence on economic policy. Mitterrand himself knew nothing about economics before assuming power. According to insiders in Paris, he has become increasingly detached from fundamental economic and strategic problems, able to concentrate only on day-to-day power struggles. In short, he has become increasingly mystical, believing himself to have been given some historic cleansing task, though having no coherent economic or strategic policy. The policy he does have is simple: destroy the people, institutions, parties, and realities of the Gaullist era. Beyond that all is haze.

The Prime Minister, Pierre Mauroy, has shown himself recently to be moving in the same direction: his awkward, halting, and mediocre presentation of the Nationalizations Bill in front of the Senate revealed a more than superficial incompetence on fundamental questions.

Who then rules economic affairs in France? In part, Jean Riboud, Chairman of the Schlumberger corporate empire; Bilderberg Society member Jacques Attali, in part. Minister of Economics Jacques Delors; and 10 or 15 equally trusted advisers all "contribute to the debate." The result: incoherence and incompetence. One need but look at the government to understand how this works: Jean-Pierre Chevenement is a radical Marxist, who is pro-nuclear and who hates Michel Rocard; Michel Rocard, Minister of State for Planning, is an anglophile technocrat and violent anti-communist who, however, hates Mitterrand and is hated in return; four Communists whose allegiance is exclusively to their party, but who have their word on policy; and two or three radical socialist utopians such as Minister of Culture Jack Lang, Minister of Solidarity Nicole Questiaux, and Elysée aides such as Club of Rome policy advocate Paul Quiles.

The cacaphony of voices merely reflects the reality that Mitterrand cannot fulfill the fantastic promises he made to the French population before the vote: a real 3 percent growth rate, major new investments, major employment programs, and reduction of inflation. In the context of worsening international economic crisis, an incompetent mixture of Keynesian reflation and selective austerity has antagonized whole layers of small businessmen who helped put Mitterrand in power.

He promised the unions many more jobs. He promised small and middle industry tax relief and the ability to compete. He now asks both to face the crisis and is attempting to impose both policies by will alone. He has alternatively imperiously commanded and coaxed the middle-sized industries to employ more workers and cut down work hours.

Yet only the very large, high-technology state enterprises, such as the aeronautics industry, can afford to employ more under conditions of world recession—and

then, according to calculations, only if productivity increases at least 3 percent.

The SNPMI, the association of small and medium-sized industries which backed Mitterrand's candidacy, now stands in opposition to everything the government does. The continuous turbulent interruptions of Budget Minister Laurent Fabius at the recent Socialist Party convention in Valence testified to the change in mood.

As the crisis intensifies domestically and internationally, the unions will be forced to oppose the government as the latter forces austerity and slashes living standards. The major gains made by the generally oppositional union, Force Ouvrière, in La Hague over the CFDT (the left-wing trade union confederation) are eloquent testimony of things to come.

Mitterrand is in a hurry. He must smash institutions, reduce the opposition, divide the enemy, get control of the nation before the crisis gets out of control.

Mitterrand's race for power has been slowed by the Senate, which has adopted a strategy of constitutional resistance. The Senate and Constitutional Court remain the constitutional power bases left to the opposition. When overruled by the National Assembly, the opposition-dominated Senate will have the Court as a final recourse. Were Mitterrand to attempt to override both Senate and Court, he would plunge into unconstitutional illegality.

The opposition is greater than he imagined. Whole modern nations cannot be reshaped in six months; Gaullism is not so easily reversible. Heady with power, Mitterrand launched in early fall a scorched-earth policy. The police were purged, and were put under systematic permanent attack by Mitterrand's Interior Minister Defferre. The minister accused the police of racialism, bias, and in some cases, criminality. In six months the government completely alienated the national police force of France, one of the best of the world. Even pro-Socialist parts of the police had reason to wonder at government policy when youth gangs were permitted to riot in the Lyons area by the government, which forbade the police to vigorously intervene.

At the same time, implicit support for Armenian, Latin American, and other varieties of terrorism has made the security forces furious: the plotters jailed for attempting to destroy the state are free today to roam the streets seeking revenge. Only after 5,000 policemen demonstrated against Defferre in Lyons three weeks ago has the government realized the full extent of the malaise. And the abolition of military security and military police has led to similar insecurity within the army.

The programs of the zero-growth utopians around Mitterrand can only be implemented in full under a dictatorship. The Socialists are moving in that direction, but clumsily. The government is stimulating opposition, creating new resistance.

JAPAN

Cabinet reshuffle strengthens Suzuki

by Richard Katz

Japanese Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki—who has condemned Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker's high interest rates more than any other head of state—reshuffled his cabinet Nov. 30 in a fashion that strengthens his administration's ability to continue opposing Volcker.

In particular, the reshuffle increases the power of the faction of former Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda within the cabinet, which is a carefully balance coalition of the five major factions within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Fukuda is widely believed to be the "elder statesman behind the throne" who advised Suzuki on many of the foreign policy initiatives taken since this spring: e.g. the alliance with West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in opposing Volcker; heavy financial support for industrialization programs in the developing countries, and opposition to Alexander Haig's China Card and provocative posture toward the U.S.S.R.

The success of the reshuffle means that Suzuki is very likely to be re-elected as LDP President and thus Prime Minister this coming fall, unless some intervening event destabilizes his regime.

The most important single shift in the regularly scheduled midterm reshuffle was the replacement of Foreign Minister Sunao Sonoda by Yoshio Sakarauchi. Sonoda's style was an unusual bluntness in criticizing what Tokyo regarded as mistakes by Washington. He had been suddenly appointed last May when Suzuki dismissed Foreign Minister Ito and reversed Ito's policy of bowing to Washington even on mistaken policies. At the time of Sonoda's appointment, one Japanese banker told *EIR*, "Sonoda was appointed because he talks big and will 'tell off' Washington. Then he will be replaced by a negotiator."

The person is Sakarauchi. A 69-year-old party politician who previously served as Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI) and in the powerhouse post of LDP Secretary-General, he is known as a "fixer", much like Suzuki himself. He is expected to apply his talents to trying to "patch things up" with Washington,