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France

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## Opposition regroupes as chaos intensifies

by Dana Sloan

France is disintegrating into chaos at a pace so rapid that observers and participants on the French political scene, whether or not favorable to the Socialist government of François Mitterrand, have been taken by surprise.

Caught off guard by the opposition to its scorched earth policies provoked in layers including parts of its own constituency, the Mitterrand government panicked and demanded that the National Assembly grant it special powers for a several month period in which to implement its zero-growth economic program and reforms. Far from quelling the disorder, the move produced a violent clash within the government between two factions which have the same goals for the reorganization of French society, but want to use different methods to bring it about. Finance Minister Jacques Delors clashed openly with Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, who is accused of moving too rapidly on all fronts without consolidating already announced policy changes. In a rare move for a French President, Mitterrand was forced to hold a special press conference on Dec. 9 in which he attempted to rally his constituency—and members of his government—around his program.

Labor unions, farmer organizations, associations of small businessmen and industrialists, and unions representing police and other law-enforcement officials have been the most active in advertising their disillusionment with the new government's policies. But the traditional parties of France have so far proved incapable of galvanizing these forces into a coherent movement around a serious programmatic alternative. Former President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has adopted the strategy of lying low until the chaos reaches such a point that his political re-emergence would serve as a rallying point. In the meantime, his intention is to not create an opposition whose only purpose, in his view, would be to give the Mitterrand forces something to rally *their* troops against. As for Jacques Chirac, the Mayor of Paris and treacherous leader of the Gaullist party whose actions during the presidential campaign helped defeat Giscard, his entire strategy for power is to accelerate the chaos in order to put himself forward as the strong-man alternative to socialism.

All indications are that the process of political unrav-

elling will accelerate. The demise of the Mitterrand government—as it now exists—is conceivable in this situation, possibly as early as next year, though what will emerge to replace it and how remains a matter of speculation.

An international mobilization of the right is underway to build new political movements from the future ruins of the Socialist government and perhaps the country.

Dozens of opposition political clubs and groups have sprung up in recent weeks, modeled on the proliferation of clubs during the 1950s that provided the original brain trusts for the Mitterrand group. These clubs for the most part regroup former collaborators of Giscard d'Estaing, and some of Jacques Chirac, and some are hybrid organizations including both.

The most significant of the groups to emerge is under the banner of Louis Pauwels, the spooky founder of the Nouvelle Droite (“New Right”) movement in France. On Dec. 5-6 the first public forum of his new group, which calls itself Pour un Alternative au Socialisme (“For an Alternative to Socialism”), took place in a conference hall packed with over a thousand participants. The conference was originally set up with the participation of some of America's leading right-wing social democrats such as *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz and Hoover Institute member Seymour Lipset. However, almost all the scheduled American speakers pulled out when a factional brawl erupted between Pauwels on one side and Committee for a Free World member Raymond Aron on the other over the participation of Alain de Benoist, a close associate of Pauwels whose name is synonymous with anti-Semitism in many circles. The confrontation over this affair signals that at the very highest levels an effort is underway to clean up the tainted image of the New Right.

What makes the New Right a factor to be reckoned with is that it understands that seizing cultural power is the only means to eventually seizing government power. This perspective is shared by a small number of political figures who, with different ideological shadings, have fundamentally similar policies. As *Le Monde* commented Dec. 8: “Their analysis, according to which the conquest of political power is nothing but the result of the conquest of cultural power, is shared by the GRCE (Groupement de Recherche sur la Civilisation Européenne) of Alain de Benoist, as well as by certain Socialists, namely [Mitterrand adviser] Jacques Attali and [Cultural Affairs Minister] Jack Lang.”

No opposition to the Mitterrand regime has a chance of accomplishing anything short of fueling the chaos, if it is not grasped that it is the battle for ideas and the minds of the French population that will determine the future course of the country's affairs. What is clearly necessary is to build a new party as an effective alternative to the “New Right” and “New Left.”