

Why the Socialists' nuclear shutdown failed

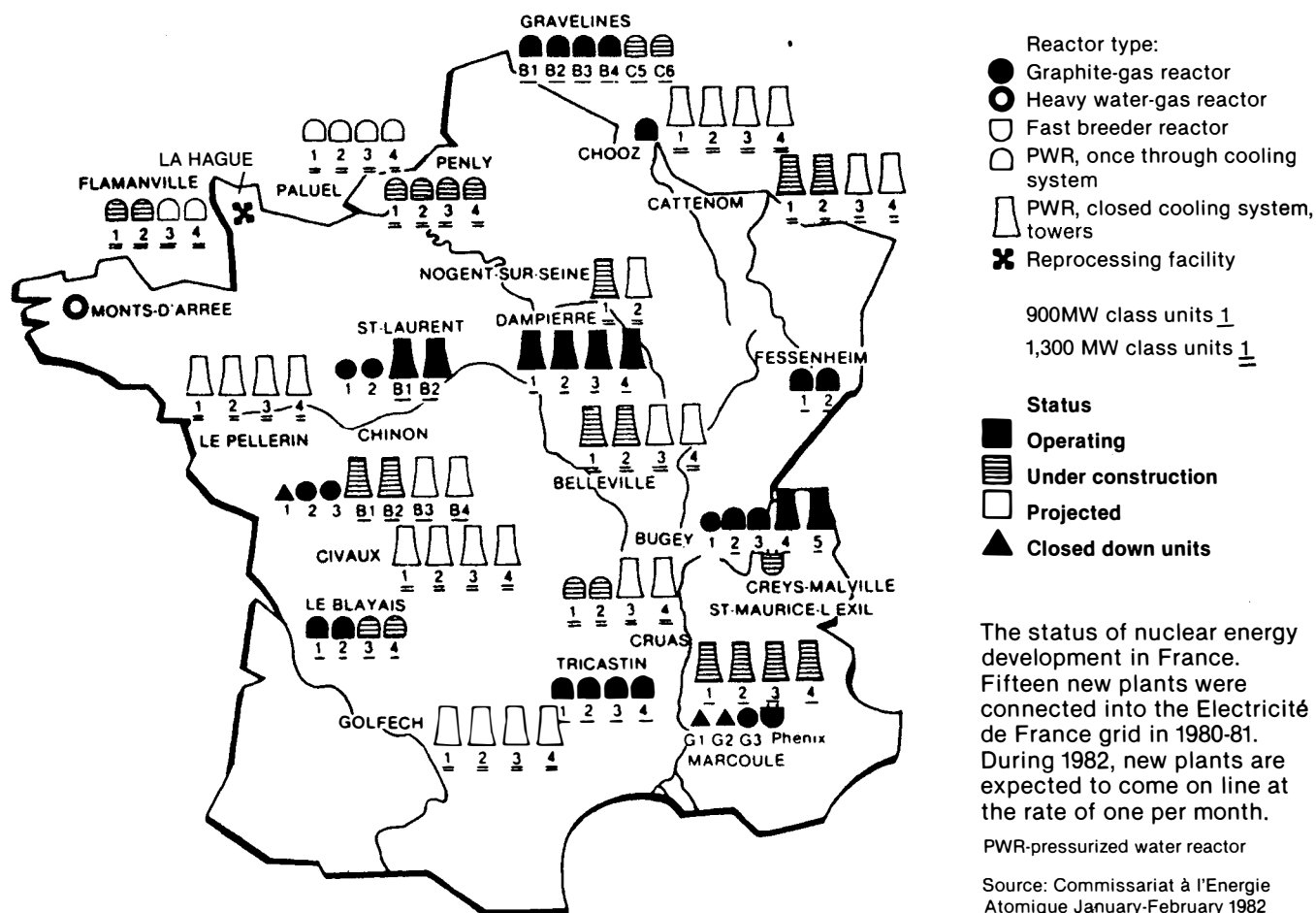
by Garance Upham Phau

With the election of François Mitterrand last May, the future looked bleak for the French nuclear program—the most ambitious of any Western nation—initiated in 1974 by the Pompidou administration and continued by the Giscard administration. Immediately upon his inauguration, Mitterrand announced the cancellation of a planned nuclear plant in Pogloff, Brittany, and a freeze on the construction of nuclear installations at five sites—Chooz, Cattenom, Civaux, Golfech, and Le Pellerin—each of which was targeted by the previous administration for completion during 1982 or 1983.

Little remains of the Socialists' original shutdown

plans. Popular pressure has forced Mitterrand to rescind all but the Pogloff cancellation; in fact, the government has given public assurances to the residents of Brittany that the plants at Le Pellerin shall be built to provide this underdeveloped region with abundant cheap energy.

In mid-October, the government energy program, submitted to the French National Assembly and ratified by that assembly, restored all construction cuts. The revised plan for nuclear plant construction during 1982 and 1983—known as the Plan 1990—does, however, slightly scale down the role of nuclear energy in the economy as a whole. It projects that by 1990 nuclear



energy will supply 26 to 28 percent of France's total energy needs, as compared to the 30 percent projection of the Giscard government. Total capacity has been scaled down to 56 gigawatts, from 60 gigawatts in the original plan. The percentage of electricity that is nuclear-supplied will remain the same, largely because the Mitterrand administration abandoned a Giscard-initiated project to shift national energy use more heavily into electricity by encouraging industry to convert from fossil fuels.

The October program also supported the construction of two additional reprocessing facilities at La Hague, giving the complex a capacity of 1,600 tons per year by 1990. The expansion of La Hague was upheld against all expectations, since the Socialists had campaigned against the reprocessing facility in the presidential drive.

Constituency pressure

What happened between Mitterrand's July freeze announcement and the October adoption of a national energy plan by the National Assembly? Essentially, the Mitterrand administration got caught in its own rhetoric about giving "power to the people." Referendums on nuclear plant construction were held in each concerned community, and in the majority of instances, the localities voted in favor of continued construction. In two instances where the local referendums returned a "no" vote, the anti-nuclear decision was overturned by vote of the regional council. The referendums, in fact, were used to organize large-scale mobilizations in favor of nuclear power, bringing together the Communist Party-run CGT trade union and opposition party officials in the effort. In many instances, even Socialist mayors and other Socialist Party elected representatives decided to listen to their constituents and buck the pressure from Paris for a freeze.

One product of this mobilization was the formation of the Committee to Save Cattenom, the four-plant nuclear complex planned for the Lorraine district near the city of Metz. Two of the Cattenom plants were already under construction when Mitterrand's freeze was announced, and after weeks of intense activity by the French affiliates of the Fusion Energy Foundation and local officials, the third reactor project has been voted up and there are excellent prospects that the fourth will also be constructed. Leaders of the Committee to Save Cattenom cite the recently-initiated publication of the pro-technology French magazine *Fusion* and the formation of the Franco-German Committee for Nuclear Energy—with the participation of West German European Labor Party leader Helga Zepp-LaRouche and French European Labor Party leader Jacques Cheminade—as key factors in the success of their efforts.



Jacques Cheminade

Where has the opposition gone?

France is faced with an ironical and dangerous situation: The population is fast turning against the Socialist government—as the March 14-21 cantonal elections which gave a landslide victory to opposition candidates demonstrated—but there is no leadership in that opposition which offers a coherent alternative economic and foreign policy program. Instead, the opposition has adopted the tactic of taking issue with every particular government decision, an attitude which reached the height of ridiculousness when associates of former President Giscard d'Estaing denounced Mitterrand for going through with a Soviet gas deal that Giscard himself had negotiated and signed.

But the most despicable act of opposition leaders came at the height of the Malvinas crisis in late April when each one acclaimed Great Britain's colonial war in the South Atlantic and brazenly competed with Mitterrand in a contest to jeopardize France's longstanding ties of friendship to Latin America and the rest of the developing sector by fawning over Margaret Thatcher.

For the time being, Jacques Chirac, the Mayor of Paris and a leader of the neo-Gaullist RPR party, is best situated to take the leadership of the opposition. Chirac is a man who will sell his shirt and his soul to whoever can get him into the Elysée palace. If that were to be the