

The problem with the French opposition

by Dana Sloan

Within hours after the government of Socialist President François Mitterrand announced a 10 percent devaluation of the franc in relation to the Deutschmark and a three-month wage/price freeze, leading members of the opposition to the Socialists fell over each other in denouncing the measures for not going far enough. For Michel Poniatowski, Interior Minister under President Giscard d'Estaing, the devaluation should have been 15 percent. For Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris and leader of the neo-Gaullist Rassemblement pour la République (RPR), "only the implementation of an austerity policy will permit us to reabsorb the deficit in the state's finances."

There was total silence on the fact that what had really happened is that the first phase of the International Monetary Fund's dictatorship over the French economy had begun. In France, where supranational institutions such as NATO and the International Monetary Fund have been considered with great suspicion for decades, not a single voice was raised after the Versailles summit which consecrated France's full alignment with those institutions. With the exception of the courageous but powerless Michel Debré, onetime Prime Minister under Charles de Gaulle, no one in the parties making up what is termed the opposition even saw that what France has lost in the last two weeks was not just several billion francs in foreign-exchange reserves, but an essential element of its national sovereignty.

Legislative impotence

So busy are France's opposition leaders fencing with this or that aspect of the Socialist government's policy that they have failed to take notice of the tidal wave that is about to engulf them. Jacques de Larosière, head of the IMF, will "end up running the French economy," the *Wall Street Journal* predicted editorially June 9, in what amounts to a statement of intent.

An example of the degeneration of the level of political thinking in France since May 10, 1981 is provided by the atmosphere reigning in the National Assembly. Since the Socialists won their legislative majority, the parliament has been in continuous regular or extraordinary session. Members of parliament are being submitted to a barrage of reform proposals which the opposition has decided to fight on a one-by-one basis. A case in point is the bill presented by Labor Minister Jean Auroux, which would give trade unions more management rights, greater "co-participation," and so on. The tactic adopted by the opposition has been to introduce several *thousand* amendments, leading to complete paralysis of the legislative process. While they fight it out on these issues, it has become the policy of the opposition not to be "distracted" by other problems, including the international and strategic questions that will determine whether France survives.

Winning next year's nationwide municipal elections has become another obsessive focus of the opposition. Strategists for Jacques Chirac now define the "fundamental mission" of political parties as "winning elections," and no more.

The Cartesian problem

Recently, in one of the few public interventions he has made since losing the presidency, Giscard d'Estaing declared that France needed "a grand design" to get back on its feet. Yet, when he spoke at the June 13 national congress of his Republican Party, Giscard also stated that "I am not here to give political leadership, I am not here to give definite answers to the problems of our time." With statements like that, it is not entirely surprising that the Friedmanite-influenced Chirac, with a much more aggressive, if opportunistic, approach, is cited in the polls as the opposition leader in whom the French population has the greatest confidence.

One of the more disastrous results of too much Cartesian schooling in France is the dichotomy it has created between so-called "men of ideas" and "men of action." The powerful conceptions of which "grand designs" are made are turned into abstract notions having little relationship to daily reality. It is in this context that the small but increasingly influential party of *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche's collaborator in France, Jacques Cheminade, has since the debacle of May 10 been appealing to "the best of the Gaullist spirit." In a statement issued after the devaluation, Cheminade called for "a real policy of national unity, above political labels."

"France and the rest of the world are becoming tugboats for the IMF, a supranational institution devoted to looting the productive capacities of the developing sector," Cheminade declared. "Let us wake up while there is still time."