

Report from Paris by Joëlle Leconte

Socialists foil Le Pen power bid

A sudden abstention by the Socialist Party in the Corsican regional assembly thwarted the National Front, but the French government crisis continues.

In elections in the regional parliament in Corsica Aug. 12, a last-minute abstention by the Socialist Party headed off a scenario which would have driven the Gaullist RPR party into the arms of Jean Marie Le Pen's right-wing extremist National Front.

The assembly had been dissolved by former Interior Minister Gaston Defferre. New elections produced no clear majority, so the choice of an assembly president was left up for grabs. The left-wing parties together accounted for 25 seats, the union of the opposition parties 20, and the National Front 7.

Le Pen's party is attracting a growing following on the basis of its racist "blood and soil" program, which includes the demand to expel all foreigners from France. Le Pen advocates the transformation of Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily into a "free trade zone"—a euphemism for a drug-running paradise on the Hong Kong model.

The National Front tried to blackmail the Gaullists, rejecting RPR standard-bearer Jean-Paul de Rocca-Serra as "not to their liking," and demanding another candidate in his place, in exchange for supporting the slate of the RPR and its allied UDF party.

The RPR's predicament was solved in an unexpected way: The Socialist Party, with nine seats in the assembly, abstained, allowing de Rocca-Serra to be elected.

This demonstration of civil responsibility helps to head off the left-

right polarization which has intensified in France since the European Parliamentary elections on June 17, and the resignation of President François Mitterrand's cabinet a month later.

What the Corsican developments portend for the national political scene remains to be determined, as the threat of ungovernability hovers over France.

The government in Paris is preoccupied with factional warfare around the complex issue of national referendums on educational and constitutional "reform." Mitterrand, faced with legislative opposition to an unpopular Socialist bill to have the state take over religious and private schools, had called for a national referendum in September to change the Constitution's provision limiting referendums, and thereby paving the way for a referendum on the school bill. Opposition to this "clever" scheme exploded, including demonstrations in Paris of over 1.5 million people, and the resignation of the cabinet pulled the rug out from under the President.

Now Mitterrand is left to somehow salvage his legitimacy and prevent further erosion of the credibility of French institutions.

As the government crisis continues, the country is being hit by a new terrorist onslaught. In the Corsican elections, the Corsican Movement for Self-Determination (MCA), the legal front for the terrorist FNLC, won three seats in the regional assembly. This is the first time that a terrorist group has received an official electoral mandate.

The Action Directe terrorist group has launched a series of attacks against military or military-related industrial targets. The most recent of these was the bombing of the headquarters of the European Space Agency (ESA) in Paris, where the Ariane space shuttle is being developed. The ESA is also the institution that would carry out Mitterrand's proposed Franco-German space station, which would defend Europe from missile attack.

A new terrorist group has recently surfaced, calling itself the M-5, and has carried out bombing attacks against train stations and other crowded public places.

Equally explosive for the Mitterrand government is the prospect for a serious economic deterioration in the coming months. The main problem will be unemployment: There are now about 2.5 million Frenchmen out of work, and trade unionists expect 3 million by the end of the year.

The government's infamous Steel Plan will eliminate 30,000 jobs by 1986, most of them in the Lorraine area; and after the bankruptcy of Creusot-Loire, the biggest French auto equipment manufacturer, it is apparent that the auto industry is also set for major "restructuring." Leaks from an unpublished government report predict that 50-70,000 jobs will be sacrificed in the auto sector.

Trade union leaders are beginning to jockey for position. Communist trade union (CGT) leader Krasucki has declared his total opposition to the government attack on jobs. The CGT is the key to the situation at the Citroen auto manufacturer, where a reorganization plan was worked out between the government and the firm to lay off 3,000 workers. The CGT has refused to make any decision about whether or not it will accept this before the employees return to work in September.