

France's anti-drug program

President Mitterrand vows to be pitiless with drug-money banks, and to fight for development in producer countries. By Christine Schier.

The French government has defined a bold, two-pronged attack to the drug problem which, if carried through, could lead to a global reform of the international financial system. The two prongs are shutting down money-laundering networks and ensuring development in producer countries. Such were the themes which dominated President François Mitterrand's mid-October trip to Ibero-America. He made a surprise stopover in Bogotá in order to attest to "France's support for the fight being waged by Colombia against the drug-traffic," according to Elysée spokesman Hubert Vedrine.

Mr. Mitterrand linked the success of the war on drugs to a policy of economic development and of debt reduction. In Venezuela, in Ecuador, and in Colombia, Oct. 9-15, he expressed deep skepticism over the U.S. Brady Plan, which claims to alleviate the crushing foreign debt burden, and he "passionately" denounced those international banks that launder proceeds for the drug mafia.

France has long recommended a global approach to the Third World debt problem, as opposed to the case-by-case negotiations used by the United States. Speaking to the Venezuelan Congress, Mr. Mitterrand described the Brady Plan as "too slow and biased"; case-by case-approach "allows powerful countries to exercise their force more than they should." The root of the drug problem, in his words, is "misery." "It is not enough for [producing] countries to counteract drug trafficking. Every responsible country in the world should be concerned with the means of reducing misfortune and misery." He insisted upon the need to give indebted countries the means to develop alternative production to cocaine and of stabilizing the prices of raw materials.

Although this may not sound new to people familiar with Lyndon LaRouche's proposals, it is probably the first time that a Western head of state has shown any determination to act on the problem. It should also be noted that for the first time the French media were posing on a daily basis the alternative in very clear terms: development or drugs, debt relief or drugs. The U.S. government, and the British government of Mrs. Thatcher, have on the contrary attempted to divorce the drug problem from the economic context.

Mr. Mitterrand declared in Bogotá: "I disapprove of the

breaking of the international convention on coffee, which was motivated by considerations of an ideological nature about the free market." This is a clear attack on U.S. policy, since the decline in coffee prices imposed by Washington has caused Colombia to lose \$500 million and encouraged Colombian peasants to go into coca production. As Colombia's President Virgilio Barco has pointed out, the loss amounts to eight times the anti-drug aid package offered by the Americans. Mr. Mitterrand intends to bring the issue up within the European Community, of which he is chairman until the end of the year. Fully one-third of Colombia's export earnings come from coffee.

This is not the first intervention the French government has made in favor of stabilizing commodity prices: The President of the Ivory Coast, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, has been waging a tireless war, supported by France, to maintain coffee and cocoa prices on world markets. Last May, the French government canceled the debts of the 35 poorest countries in the world.

Parallel to Mitterrand's visit to South America, the Presidents of the main drug-producing countries—Colombia, Bolivia, Peru—were meeting in Ica to map out a common strategy, and called for a special Inter-American summit on drugs, which George Bush agreed to attend. Mitterrand was also invited by Peruvian President Alan García, who undoubtedly would like him to counterpose his views on development to those of Washington.

It would not be the first clash between Paris and Washington on the subject. At the Paris summit of the Group of Seven last July, Washington, supported by London and Bonn, refused to discuss the global approach to the debt crisis proposed by Mitterrand, as well as great infrastructure projects for the Third World that France is working on (especially flood control in Bangladesh and greening projects in the Sahara).

The recurrent flaw in French proposals is that the government never challenges the World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies. Indeed, Mitterrand makes it a point to applaud their activities in the Third World. It may be relevant, that French technocrats have frequently headed



French President François Mitterrand. In pledging support for Colombia's fight against the drug traffickers, he emphasized that economic development is the key to winning the war on drugs.

these institutions (Michel Camdessus, Jacques de Larosière).

Abolish banking secrecy

In Caracas, Venezuela, François Mitterrand shocked many by stating he was in favor of "abolishing banking secrecy in the world," and calling on banks "everywhere in the world, to investigate and check the origin of funds" deposited. In this, he said, "we must be absolutely ruthless." Any French banker caught laundering drug money "will face harsh sanctions and be treated like a common criminal." In the European Community, "so-called honorable institutions may be making a living from receiving and using this money. . . . I do not wish to make any hasty statements. But I have my suspicions."

After the G-7 heads of state had agreed in Paris on the need to dismantle banking circuits involved in dirty money, the French government organized a conference at the end of September which brought together banking and police experts from the different countries to discuss the problem. Oddly enough, the meeting was entirely secret and no information filtered out into the press, except to report that offshore banking paradise Luxembourg had refused to participate.

The anti-drug program developed by Interior Minister Pierre Joxe (see box) is heavily focused on money laundering and greatly increases the means of law enforcement agencies to track down financial criminals.

Claude Cheysson, former foreign minister and former head of the European Commission, recently called for a "brutal repression of those who every government knows are laundering drug money. This criminality should be a felony." He also showed skepticism about controlling the export of chemicals used in refining heroin or cocaine, and other addicting drugs: "Let's not fool ourselves. The power of the pharmaceutical companies far outweighs ours."

During the same conference, held in Paris Oct. 8, French Health Minister Claude Evin stated he "was ferociously against any decriminalization. This would be a Munich-type approach to the problem," he said, referring to the infamous

appeasement of Hitler in 1938 at Munich. In a well-aimed blow at Milton Friedman and his acolytes in France such as Guy Sorman, Evin added: "The theoretical argument in favor of decriminalization brings to mind the disastrous economic policies of the Chicago School."

Finally, we should note an important editorial published in *Le Figaro* of Oct. 13. The well-known journalist George Suffert denounced the indispensable "complicity of certain states and many banks" in drug running. The "banking universe" is a "closed circle with its own rules and especially secrets" that must be opened up, according to George Suffert. He does not hesitate to attack Syria by name: "Should Syria be allowed to finance her military adventures with the blood of the youth from New York, London, Paris, or Bogotá?"

In Venezuela, Mitterrand ended a speech on the banks by advising "just a little more patience." But such an attitude, given the precariousness of the financial system and the intensity of the drug mafia's reprisals, could prove fatal.

The "sacred duty" of France

French Interior Minister Pierre Joxe announced his plan for fighting drug-running in an interview with the daily *France-Soir* of Sept. 9. Stopping the drug plague is the "sacred duty of France" according to this Socialist minister who considers this task "the most important job of his ministry." The measures he announced involve important increases in manpower for various law enforcement agencies. Other highlights are:

- Creation of an agency for repression of financial crime. Fifteen "super-cops" specialized in finances, accounting, and taxes, will be responsible for identifying and dismantling drug money connections.
- Specialized groups have been set up within the judicial police of four major cities (Marseilles, Bordeaux, Versailles, Lyons) in order to investigate all kinds of financial traffic, but especially drug-related ones.
- The number of investigators at the French drug enforcement agency, OCTRIS will be doubled.
- Anti-drug specialists from the French police will be sent to many "risk" countries, in accordance with international agreements. They will act as technical consultants and intelligence relays.

France has already extended technical assistance to Colombia. Teams from the Security police are there to train Colombian investigators in detecting drug traffic, and others are collaborating on the security systems for prisons.