

France is fed up with Mitterrand's policy

by Christine Bierre

The virtual support given by French President François Mitterrand to the Moscow coup, during a nationally televised statement on Aug. 19, the evening of the putsch, could mean the end of the Mitterrand regime, or at least of the unholy alliance of France with Britain and the United States which emerged during the Gulf war.

Mitterrand in his statement refused to issue a full condemnation of the coup, and instead read a statement from the junta pledging to maintain all international commitments of the U.S.S.R., stating that he would judge the "new regime" through its acts.

This was the fourth major foreign policy error committed by Mitterrand since the revolutionary process started in eastern Europe, and the fact that the President has totally missed the train of history has created a crisis of confidence in the national government. When the Berlin Wall came down, Mitterrand tried his best to halt the reunification of Germany, declaring that it would take five years, and paying a visit to East German "liberal communist" leader Hans Modrow. France refused to support the independence of the Baltic countries, and more recently sided with the pro-communist Serbs against the independence of Slovenia and Croatia.

But Mitterrand's support for the junta in Moscow provoked a deeper national shame. Said parliamentarian Jean-François Deniau: France used to be proud of being among the more progressive nations, and now we are among the most reactionary. Attacks against Mitterrand are rampant within his own Socialist Party. The faction around former Defense Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement denounced this latest mistake and also Mitterrand's support for the Serbs. Within the Socialist camp, people are talking about "Bourguibism," in reference to former Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba, who became senile and insisted on governing anyway, making wild and erratic decisions. Reports are that many of Mitterrand's closest advisers are now extremely disaffected with Mitterrand and are demanding a general review of policies.

Demands for a break with Bush

Mitterrand's latest mistake will, ironically, create the conditions that can lead to a breakdown of the "special alliance" with President George Bush. Already an article in the leading daily *Le Monde* of Sept. 2 indicated that Mitterrand's virtual support for the coup-plotters came after a phone call

to Bush, who advised this course. Whether this is true or not, the fact that such a story was leaked is already an indication of a new state of mind at the Elysée presidential palace.

The speeches by Socialist Party leaders at the party's summer school were even more indicative of the change in mood in the French government. The rank and file Socialists are known to be extremely unhappy with France's tailing behind Bush, in particular since the Gulf war. Speeches by European Community President Jacques Delors and by Foreign Minister Roland Dumas indicate that the government is preparing an anti-Bush turn, to save whatever it can of the Mitterrand presidency and if possible, of the honor of France.

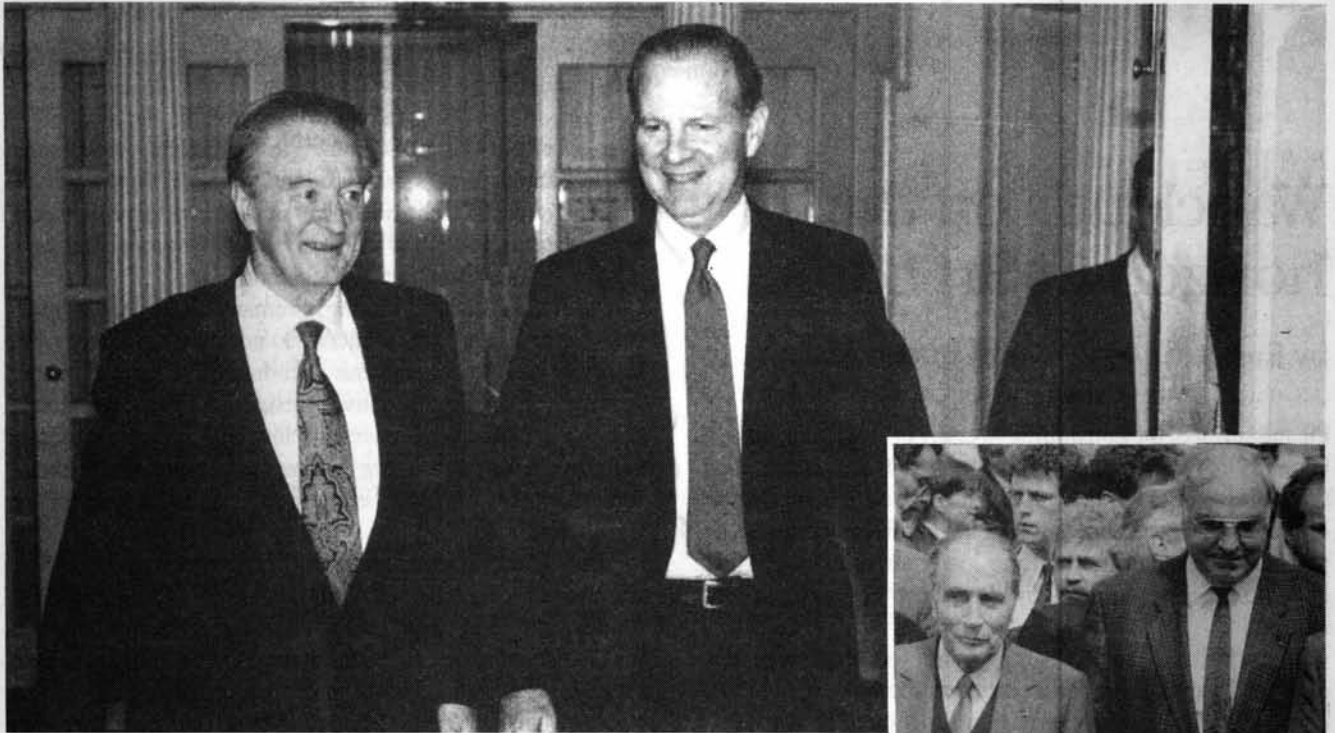
The "temptation of hegemonism" seems to be the new phrase used to attack the "only superpower left," the United States of George Bush. In his speech, Dumas expressed concern that "America might reign without a counterweight. . . . I am telling our American friends: They must realize that being the world's top power creates not only possibilities and rights, but also duties." He urged the U.S. not to give in to the temptation to try to shape every world event to its own profit. The world is entering a "new historic phase," said Dumas, who defined the top priority as being the leveling of differences between the rich and the poor and dealing with Third World problems.

Denouncing the "hegemonism" of the United States was also one of the themes of an intervention by Jacques Delors on Sept. 2, in a radio interview. Speaking about the Yugoslavian crisis, Delors deplored the fact that Europe has no military force which could have been deployed into Yugoslavia for a peacekeeping effort, and hoped that "a strong French initiative" would be launched to remedy this situation. A journalist asked Delors whether the crumbling of the eastern empire has not led to the emergence of a "unique universal superpower, the United States," and if this would not lead to a "temptation of hegemonism." Delors replied: "I would not like to finish my political career, leaving to the younger generations a Europe which is not powerful or well organized enough not to be forced to submit, in one way or another, to an excessive influence of the U.S.A." "The answer is yes," stated Delors, to the question of whether this tendency toward hegemonism was visible during the course of important international negotiations. "Why lie and look for little formulas, when the answer is yes," he said.

Washington says it is not opposed to the construction of a united Europe, continued Delors, but "when I gave a speech in London calling for a common European defense, we saw the reactions immediately." Far from going against NATO, such a defense would strengthen NATO, said Delors, complaining that the U.S. has great difficulty in accepting such a view.

Words or deeds?

We will judge these leaders by their deeds, not their words, to return to Mitterrand's formula.



French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, on the left with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker on a visit to Washington in February 1991, when France was collaborating closely with the United States in the war against Iraq, is now positioning France for an anti-Bush turn to save whatever it can of the presidency of François Mitterrand (inset, with Helmut Kohl).

There are indeed signs that the French government will put its money where its mouth is. Since Mitterrand's deplorable statement, the general tendency of the government has been to backtrack full-speed on all the touchy issues. Thus, Foreign Minister Dumas managed to be the first high-ranking representative of a major European country to reach Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, to negotiate the establishment of diplomatic relations with all the Baltic states. Serbian communist strongman Slobodan Milosevic was called in for a meeting at the Elysée, where he was pressured to adopt the new European peace plan, while Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, who also met with Mitterrand, was reassured concerning EC support for Croatian independence.

Finally, the French government is determined to increase aid to the former Soviet Union, despite tremendous resistance from the banks that are still smarting from recent losses in those markets and older losses on their loans to the Soviet Union.

France's Jacques Attali, the president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), visited Moscow as soon as the putschists had been defeated, and called for a Europe of 30 countries, including all the former Soviet republics. Attali has been fighting for the United States and Japan to lift their veto on the question of the ridiculous \$200 million ceiling on EBRD credits to Russia.

Jacques Delors is supporting Attali in this respect, and mentioned a specific project in Leningrad which he would like to finance. Delors also indicated that before the end of the year, the EC will be sending a "signal" to the former East bloc countries, in the form of political-economic and cultural agreements with the EC. This does not constitute full membership, but will lead to an association status. Concerning the former Soviet Union, Delors indicated that the EC aid will be in several forms: 1) short-term financial aid to deal with inflation; 2) short-term aid to help the republics get through the winter, with food and medical supplies; and 3) technical aid of \$169 million for development of distribution and transport networks, energy, and education of company administrators. Delors announced that the equivalent of over \$1 billion in food and medical aid has already been sent.

Finally, Economic and Finance Minister Pierre Bérégovoy left for Moscow the first week in September, announcing that "one should imagine a kind of Marshall Plan" for the former U.S.S.R.

This is all very promising, but the litmus test will be whether the French insist on applying the International Monetary Fund's free market "shock therapy" methods to the eastern economy, or whether they will return to a Colbertist-Listian approach to economic development, from the Atlantic to the Urals.