

Cheminade and the LYM Revive Republicanism

by Fred Bayle,
LaRouche Youth Movement

“Now I’m back in shape.” This is how one French mayor ended his meeting with Jacques Cheminade, the Presidential candidate of the Solidarity and Progress party, who is allied with Lyndon LaRouche. As the April 22 date of the Presidential election is getting closer, the LaRouche Youth Movement (LYM) and Cheminade are awakening the soul of the country, so that the nation can shake off its rotten elite, and regain its republican tradition.

To get a sense of that, let’s first discuss what is so special about this Presidential election.

France is the only European country which has a real Presidential system. Gen. Charles de Gaulle’s legacy, the “Fifth Republic,” allow the French people to elect its President, (in a two-round election) by direct vote, thus bypassing any parliamentary decision to designate a ruler by compromise.

Yet, not anybody can get to be on the ballot. All candidates must receive at least 500 endorsements from elected officials (mayors, regional representatives, parliamentary deputies, and so on). Once these endorsements have been checked, the candidates each receive 150,000 euros from the state to print the ballots, a declaration of candidacy distributed to all households, and posters. By law, each official candidate has to be equally covered by the media, with the “smaller” candidates and the “big machine” candidates all treated equally. It is the one and only fair election in France.

De Gaulle’s idea of leadership was swept away after 14 years of President François Mitterrand (1981-95); throughout the years, the required number of endorsements has increased from 100 to 500, in order to force the debate into a right-wing/left-wing sophisticated box. But, in 1995, Jacques Cheminade violated these oligarchical rules, by breaking into the Presidential race, with more than 500 mayors vouching for him; he thus obtained two hours of prime time on all national TV channels. The establishment’s reaction was surprise and panic. Sabotage, slanders, lies, as well an attempt to bankrupt him, were immediately used to try to stop him in his tracks.

In 2002, the same ruling circles, not to be caught by surprise a second time, went into full gear during the final phase of the endorsement gathering, launching a vicious defamation operation to scare away the well over 500 mayors who had committed themselves to stand for Cheminade’s candidacy.

As a result, only 406 mayors kept their endorsements, too few to allow Cheminade to run. The French nation was thus left with an unexpected second electoral round that pitted Jacques Chirac (center-right wing) against Jean Marie LePen (right-wing fascist).

Many, many people got a cold shower that day. First the graceful media put the blame on the “small candidates, who took away votes from the Socialist Party,” and then they blamed the mayors who enabled these candidates to run by signing for them. Mayors, in particular, became victims of a kind of lynch mob operation run by the local media, and sometimes even by their own constituency. The worst is that many villages were not granted their usual income subsidies because of the mayor’s choice of candidate, which was made public by the government.

Now, more than three out of five mayors whom we contact via telephone simply reject the idea of signing for any candidate, no matter what the party.

Occupation and Resistance

The current situation in France is tragic. During the past five years, people have begun to feel the bitter consequences of the 1980s turn toward globalization.

During the last quarter of 2006, the Renault auto giant saw its sales fall by one-third, and there was massive outsourcing in the textile industry, computers, and engineering. It is expected that by 2013, more than two-thirds of the farmers will have disappeared, while 1 out of every 10 children in the country now suffers from malnutrition. All in all, the real figures of unemployment amount to about 20% of the working-age population. We are far away from that period in which France was the third nation to launch a rocket in space. Nowadays, all the neo-conservative networks are claiming that it is the end of the “French model,” which came out of World War II, inspired by Franklin D. Roosevelt and the roots of the French nation-state as de Gaulle represented it.

The euro system brought a downfall of the living condition of the middle class and of the lower 20% of income brackets, at the same time that the upper 5% transformed themselves into grand feudal landlords, and the upper 20%, as in the United States, benefits from confetti money. In this situation, the political layers are acting like Edgar Allan Poe’s nobility in “The Masque of the Red Death”—protecting themselves by a veil of media, to stay blind and deaf to the growing discontent of the population.

Recently, three big movements have created ferment for a major shift. First, in May 2005, came the “No” vote to the European Constitution, which was intended to put the seal on a free-trade kind of European “cooperation.” Then there was an uproar among high school students against budget cuts in their education. Finally, in May 2006, there was a youth mobilization to counter a labor law which was promoting “greater flexibility” (which translates into freedom to randomly fire employees) and low-paid jobs for young people. As a result of this, the registration of new voters, most of them



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LaRouche Youth organize for Cheminade in Paris.

youth, doubled, tripled, and was even multiplied by ten in certain cities. All of these events showed a determined longing for a greater change, but also a growing risk of a Jacobin-type of insurrection if the elites remain deaf to the calls of the population.

The predetermined choices for the available change today are to be found with Nicolas Sarkozy, a French neo-con and admirer of Britain’s Tony Blair, or with Ségolène Royal, a Socialist, harboring the colors of the Blair model. Other candidates are either extremist, environmentalist, or represent some sort of folkloric entertainment.

People are searching for something different, something deeply rooted in that which built the nation, and that’s where Cheminade’s campaign is crucial.

Reawakening the ‘Free France’

The mayors whom Jacques Cheminade met with recently were neither part of the political elite, nor representing larger cities, but rather smaller ones with less than a thousand inhabitants. They all have different social backgrounds, and come from all parts of the country. They are the only elected officials in France who receive more than the majority of the votes whenever there is an election, which reflects a real recognition of their hard work. Their everyday mandate has become more and more difficult, mostly because of great budget cuts. In a recent poll, 75% of the mayors declared that they will not run in coming elections.

The French LYM had reached 16,000 mayors during the last year, setting up meetings to convince them to support Cheminade. Out of 700 mayors with whom we’ve met, 220 have signed the form vouching to endorse Cheminade, and the same number have refused. The determining factor now, is to get back to the 300-400 undecided mayors as well as contacting 10,000 new ones. We have six weeks to gather the remaining 300 endorsements to guarantee that Cheminade

will be on the ballot. This is a big challenge for the French LaRouche movement, as many of the likely signers are distrustful toward politics and pessimistic about changing the situation!

And yet, they are the necessary means by which we are taking back the nation. They are moved to hear and see young people fighting as we do, but their real inspiration is Cheminade himself, when they get a chance to talk with him (as has been the case for the last few months, when Cheminade has been driving all over the country).

Three Hidden Traditions

To grasp the different currents which converge toward Cheminade, let's look at three meetings that he had with different representatives.

The left humanist. "So why do people say you're a fascist?" one mayor asked Cheminade, testing him. He had been discussing Jacques with some of his trade union colleagues. "Your youth [the LYM had introduced him to Jacques] told me you were not political!" to which Cheminade exclaimed, "They are wrong, I am political!"

"But from which side," the mayor asked, "left- or right-wing? I read your program. It is not clear; those who say they are not from any of these sides are always right-wingers."

Cheminade told him about Jean Jaurès (leader of the first branch of the Socialist Party at the beginning of the 20th Century), Léon Blum, and Jean Zay (leaders of the Popular Front in 1936), as being his references in the French left, and how today's Socialists were betraying this heritage. The mayor finally relaxed, and smiled while Cheminade continued to explain how the Communist Party during the 1936s social movement organized some choral and drama performances in the streets to elevate people's culture. This contrasts with today's leftist populist culture, which pulls people down.

Once he had listened to Cheminade's ideas concerning education, he reacted by describing how he thought the Trotskyist left was destructive, and he understood Jacques as having a more constructive and optimistic outlook. He then confessed his other profession—namely that of a German teacher. He had, in fact, read with great delight two articles on our website, "Schiller for France" and another on Heinrich Heine, both by Cheminade. The best people in our network are happy to see writings on art and poetry on a political website.

The remaining Gaullists. An old mayor declared solemnly to Cheminade that even though he agreed to set up a meeting, he would never sign for anyone. "The only candidate I ever supported was the General"—that is in 1965, he supported de Gaulle for President. Cheminade replied that he had not come merely for a signature, but rather to give him a history lesson. He then took the current devaluation of the British pound to draw the parallel between the 1967-68 period and today. He showed him how de Gaulle's opposition to the nonconvertibility of dollars into gold led to the May 1968 insurgency and

de Gaulle's forced departure.

The mayor said he knew about that already. Then Cheminade said: "But here comes the second lesson of history. In 1968, your people, the Gaullists, were on the good side! But today, which side do you think Sarkozy is on?" The man uneasily admitted that Cheminade was right.

Cheminade then explained his aim: that by pushing for infrastructure projects and research programs, he was taking up de Gaulle's concept of "planification." The mayor became very enthusiastic about Jacques's military program, and told him how his own military service had been such a great experience.

Cheminade concluded by telling him, "I hope you have a bad conscience for not signing for me!" The mayor then smiled and answered, "Give me eight days," adding, "I did not expect that."

The Social Christians. The first words uttered by this mayor were very loud: "Your program is full of American terms. Look, 'New Bretton Woods'! Sounds like American crap!" Cheminade took him by surprise by saying, "Good." The man, even more irritated, retorted, "Why do you say that?" Cheminade replied, "I'm pleased to see that you've read my program." Both of them started laughing.

The mayor was then briefed about the American part of the LaRouche organization, which has been leading the fight to impeach both Cheney and Bush. He responded: "That's good. Bush is not a Christian anyway."

The mayor had previously signed for Christine Boutin, a so-called "social Catholic" who just endorsed Nicolas Sarkozy. He and Cheminade had a good talk about the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, Pope Leo XIII, and Pope John Paul II's encyclicals on human labor.

This Social Christian mayor, who at times appeared to have right-wing tendencies, couldn't stand Sarkozy, whom he considers a populist "disease."

After a two-hour meeting, he signed the endorsement form with a smile, declaring: "After talking with you, now I'm back in shape. I hope you'll come back. My City Hall is open to you."

Cheminade's campaign platform has thus far created great curiosity within all of these different currents. The "capital budget" conception of the project answers the mayors' anxiety about how to build a better future for their children and their constituency. This way, the alliance between Cheminade and a core—or rather, chorus—of mayors is not just a compromise, but a real commitment. They see in him the same type of character that de Gaulle, Roosevelt, Konrad Adenauer, and Pierre Mendès-France represented.

Many mayors have already decided to sign, but they are still waiting to meet with Cheminade, "to check if he really does exist," as one mayor said: "The youth described to me a person called Cheminade. I rather trusted them because they are so convincing. But the reality of the character in my office is a true moment of hope."