

EXCURSUS 1

Julian Crandall Hollick on FRANCE: THE REPUBLIC COMES OF AGE

The election of François Mitterrand to the French presidency on May 10 was an event of truly historic significance for France and the world. After twenty-three years the Right's seemingly inevitable monopoly on political power in France has been broken. The Left's triumph may yet prove short lived, but it has removed a major psychological barrier and demonstrated that the Fifth Republic has finally come of age.

No one who was in France on the night of May 10 will readily forget the mood—first of incredulity and then of sheer joy as the reality and magnitude of Mitterrand's achievement sank in. Not even an ominous thunderstorm that swept over Paris soon after midnight could dampen the enthusiasm of the tens of thousands who marched to the Bastille to celebrate the overthrow of "*le roi Giscard*."

Everything had pointed to a repetition of the 1974 election, when Valéry Giscard d'Estaing defeated Mitterrand by 300,000 votes. The 1981 campaign, short by U.S. standards, had been dismissed as predictable and boring. "France yawns," concluded one newsweekly on the eve of the first-round poll on April 26. All the opinion polls had given Giscard a wide margin over Mitterrand, although it began to narrow dramatically by early March. Moreover, the one man likely to defeat Giscard, the young Socialist Michel Rocard, had been outmaneuvered in his bid to gain the investiture of the Socialist party by Mitterrand—a veteran with a reputation as a loser (this was his third attempt at the presidency) and a political intriguer, whom the public had long mistrusted.

It was not just his past that seemed to be against Mitterrand. The Left in France had missed its chance too many times for many observers to take it completely seriously. The Socialists and Communists had failed this time even to make a serious effort to convince the uncommitted electorate that they could offer a credible alternative to the Right. In 1977, on the eve of apparent victory in the legislative elections of March, 1978, the Communists deliberately smashed the two parties' electoral alliance, fearing a possible Socialist edge at the polls. Between then and last April 26, the Communists turned away from so-called Eurocommunism and back to unconditional support of the Soviet Union, while the Socialists—and Mitterrand in particular—became the target of their most bitter attacks. In the eyes of the French Communists the real enemy has always been the Socialists and not the Right.

Giscard d'Estaing, on the other hand, seemed to have nearly everything going for him. He had succeeded so well in guiding France through the prolonged recession caused by the leaps in world energy prices that France was able to enjoy in the '70s the industrial world's highest growth rate. Social legislation and the role and status of women were liberalized. France began to emerge as a society at peace with itself. In retrospect this newfound tolerance may well have been one of the factors that finally convinced many conservative voters they could vote against the Right and for change without the sky falling down on them.

Giscard also possessed several handicaps, the importance of which may have been underestimated. Unemployment had risen fourfold and inflation was still in dou-

ble figures. Giscard was loathed by the Gaullist supporters of his rival and former prime minister, Jacques Chirac, who broke with him in 1976 and ever since has coveted the presidency—even at the price of seeing Giscard defeated and Mitterrand elected. Finally, the president had accumulated such power that he began to be compared to a "republican monarch," whose friends controlled France in the name of a caste. Tainted by scandal, aloof and overbearing, Giscard began to irritate, then to disgust many of his earliest supporters.

If Giscard was betrayed finally by his own character and the rivalry that pitted him against Jacques Chirac, Mitterrand was also helped by the Communists' attempt to portray him as the enemy of the Left even as they tried to exploit racist fears against immigrant workers in a crudely orchestrated and xenophobic campaign. The Communists miscalculated badly, slumping to just 15 per cent of the April 26 vote, while the Socialist share rose to 26 per cent, putting Mitterrand within striking distance of the incumbent for the run-off on May 10. Giscard d'Estaing was forced to launch a series of wild attacks on Mitterrand once it became clear that the Communists would indeed support the latter. Freed from the charge that he would be the hostage of the Communists because dependent on their support, Mitterrand preferred to project the image of a calm and steady statesman who would seek to unite, rather than divide, the electorate. It was now Mitterrand who appeared presidential and Giscard the shrill challenger.

Mitterrand has won only half the battle. If he is to be able to implement his program of rapid growth through the now-unfashionable Keynesian methods of deficit spending and public-sector jobs, he must translate his May 10 majority into a parliamentary majority in late June. Will the French decide to give Mitterrand the benefit of the doubt? Or will they decide that one act of daring is enough for now and return the Right to power in the National Assembly? If the latter, France will have a left-wing president and a right-wing government—an unprecedented situation—and Mitterrand may come under pressure to resign. But for now nothing has been decided and there is much left to play for.

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EXCURSUS 2

John V. H. Dippel on WEST GERMANY'S GHOSTS

A generation ago, as much of Europe lay in rubble, "Germany," "Nazi," and "political persecution" were practically synonymous. Hitler's Holocaust had taken its grim toll. Not only had millions of Jews perished in the death camps, but also Social Democrats, gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, homosexuals, criminals—Germans who, for one reason or another, did not fit into the totalitarian, Aryan folk community or had opposed it.

This was the legacy of the new West German state in 1949. To the Germans recovering from defeat it was essential that this infamous chapter of their history be forever closed. "Never again" became a rallying cry as much in Bonn as it was in Jerusalem. To make clear to the world their repudiation of Nazism, the founders of the