

Rocard: a postindustrial enragé

Garance Phau describes the French Socialist Party leader's recent address at Princeton University.

His whole demeanor reminded me of Milton's description of the devil in *Paradise Lost*: as Lucifer peers into the Garden of Eden and sees its beauty, he resolves to destroy it, blaming God for his own action.

Educated to foster France's central institutions, to develop the nation's human and technological potential, Socialist Michel Rocard has visibly committed himself to the destruction of the country he was supposed to serve as a senior official, an *Inspecteur des Finances*. This writer was reminded of wild PSU meetings she attended following the 1968 "Days of Rage," when he called upon thousands of youths to revolt and destroy French capitalism. Since then Rocard had adopted a liberal image to appeal to a managerial, middle-class following.

During the question period at the Princeton event, I pointed out the similarities between the arguments of deindustrialization currently made by the leader of the Socialist CFDT trade-union federation, Edmond Maire, a Socialist Party ally, and the speeches Rocard had delivered to the wild PSU meetings in 1968, and asked him where he stood at present. Did he agree with Maire's call for deindustrialization? Rocard's face lit up; he said the question was "excellent" and proceeded to affirm his agreement with Maire's call for effectively shutting down the French nuclear industry.

Rocard elaborated that one should distinguish between the old, "proven" nuclear technologies and the new fast breeder and reprocessing capabilities. The latter, he said, are "unsafe," and should be stopped at once. To counter its oil-import dependence, France has to resort to conventional nuclear power plants, he continued—but they require "maximum democratic controls." Rocard ended up admitting, as the Socialists have never publicly admitted in France, that "yes, there is an agreement between the CFDT and the PSF on the nuclear question." During his presentation, Rocard had already complained that the ecology movement (backed and nurtured by the CFDT) "while as big as the American one, hasn't yet found a constitutional way to have an impact on the country."

The main topic Rocard said he would address in his presentation was the economic crisis, and his disagreements with French Prime Minister Raymond Barre on ways to resolve it. Barre has maintained a tight-credit, fiscal-austerity blanket on French industrial growth. Rocard's criticisms were, however, aimed in other directions. Barre is too "dirigist"; Barre supports a "strong franc," he complained. Barre does not grasp the "evil of central banks" as instruments of "industrial capitalism."

Rocard went on to instruct the Princeton audience on how the world economy is affected by "what Karl Marx called 'overproduction crises.'" "The markets become saturated," inflation runs rampant, unemployment grows, all because the economy generates a social surplus, which is invested to benefit "the few." These crises are "cyclical"; every time they occur the center for world domination in the monetary, technological, and political arena is shifted. After the 1880 to 1890 depression, the British ruled the world with the pound and the steam engine. The 1929 crisis and World War II led to American predominance with the rule of the dollar and the car industry. The crisis which started in 1972 is opening the future for electronics, biogenetics, and related "light industries." There are no new centers of command as yet, except that it is evident "it has escaped the European zone." Credit policy should be tailored to favor some of those newer light industries, and shift away from supporting the capital-intensive heavy industrial sector, guilty of overproduction. "Only small business can create jobs," said Rocard, and small businessmen know that "capitalism is not, and never has been, good for them."

Rocard launched into an attack against the principle of "rent"—mixing together speculative profits and legitimate returns on stock and equity investment. The upshot of his argument was that society ought to stop producing a net overall surplus, and turn inward, breaking up into small *féodalités*, as the late President de Gaulle called it, with workers and cottage ventures

managing small regional and communal enterprises.

Rocard was asked whether he agrees with the latest proposal by French economics pundit Jacques Fabra, who was recently featured in the *Wall Street Journal* echoing the Warburg plan to force discount rates above the interbank overnight borrowing rate, and thus leave commercial banks no resort for covering reserve requirements but to call in loans and refuse to replenish credit lines.

Rocard said, "Yes, technically I absolutely agree." But Fabra and, he added, Raymond Barre, do not go far enough in recognizing "the evil of central banks" as an instrument for industrial investment. Neo-Marxist Rocard had in effect just endorsed the monetarist Friedrich von Hayek's longstanding proposal to disband central bank powers over issuance of money and credit, and eliminate any centralized repository of eco-

nomie surplus for reinvestment.

I asked Rocard to comment on French politician Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's view that the Third World can and should bypass industrialization and install electronics production. Rocard made a face, and replied that he definitively disagrees: He proceeded to recommend that the underdeveloped nations get no industry at all. "Third World development is a matter of culture," he said. Looking at Iran or Brazil, he said, it is evident that industrialization creates "social contradictions which make countries explode." One should foster in both the advanced sector and the Third World an *artisanat* approach—arts and crafts. The only industries the Third World should have are those "rooted in traditional cultures," e.g. pottery and labor-intensive textiles.

The NATO question

On the question of European defense, Rocard, who had just met Henry Kissinger on the occasion of the Second International meeting in Washington Dec. 5-7, sounded very much like the former secretary of state. In particular he echoed Kissinger's complaint in the French daily *Le Figaro* two weeks ago on the lack of will by the Europeans to engage in a massive military buildup. "The Americans are right in saying that we must strengthen the Atlantic Alliance," said Rocard, and France must be the "motive force in awakening the defense reflex in Europe," for that reflex "can only come from France." In his rapid, broken English Rocard kept insisting what a disgrace it was for France not to push Europe in that direction. Rocard refrained from calling for France's re-integration into NATO, as he did six months ago, or demanding, as he did in August, that the French navy deploy to the port of Gdansk to aid Poland's striking workers. He clearly indicated, in response to individual questions after the event, his full agreement with the Second International proposal to reorganize NATO along the lines of the Atlantic Alliance Rapid Deployment Force to quickly deploy "limited war" forces throughout the world, and agreed that a Soviet invasion of Poland today would go a long way toward pushing France in that direction.

Down with the king

What is Mr. Rocard's perspective if, as he predicted, his rival Mitterrand loses the presidential elections to French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and the possibility of a popular front is postponed indefinitely? Rocard pointed out that France can become "explosive," when there is "blockage of reforms," and the country has some experience in "getting rid of kings." Giscard is currently being referred to as a monarch by Anglo-American commentators and the French socialist press.

After Mitterrand...

Having occupied various high-level government posts in the 1950s and early 1960s, Michel Rocard next led the Parti Socialiste Unifié, a small social-democratic formation that became very radical during the May 1968 student riots. In mid-1973, he left the PSU to join its elder brother, the Socialist Party, and was placed on the party's executive in 1975.

Two months ago, Rocard announced his candidacy for the April 1981 presidential elections. Faced with Socialist chief François Mitterrand's determination to run, and the party's subsequent endorsement of Mitterrand, Rocard pulled out of the race. He is now devoting his energies to the consolidation of his faction in the party, expecting that Mitterrand's electoral defeat will end the aging leader's career.

Mitterrand is an advocate of the "Union of the Left" with the French Communist Party, while Rocard refuses to bow to the restrictions involved in attempting to sustain an electoral alliance with a working-class party; and Rocard rejects a "catalogue of reforms," as he characterizes the Socialist program. Mitterrand represents provincial France; faithful to his peasant soil, as he would say, he never learned any language but French. Rocard, who speaks fluent English, represents the new generation of Socialist International leaders: technocrats who do not hesitate to openly preach dismantling of industry, of labor unions, and of national sovereignty.