

Fifth Republic, Giscard d'Estaing under attack from all sides

by Dana Sloan

What do the *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and *The Economist* of London have in common with presidential contenders Socialist François Mitterrand and neo-Gaullist Mayor Jacques Chirac of Paris, or the anarchist comedian-become-presidential-candidate, Michel Coluche?

They are the orchestrators and actors in a now-open conspiracy to defeat French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in next spring's elections and destroy the institutional framework that has given France the ability not only to survive the last 22 years of sometimes grave destabilization (ranging from the near-civil war during the Algerian War to the May 1968 revolt) but to assert itself powerfully on the international scene with an independent foreign policy. If Giscard remains in office, his enemies have indicated that they will "settle for" destroying the Fifth Republic, their fundamental objective with, or without, Giscard.

From the far left to far right, Giscard's attackers are on a remarkably similar track. While François Mitterrand compared Giscard to Louis XIV, Jacques Chirac's campaign manager, Charles Pasqua, is accusing Giscard of "creeping fascism." Candidate Coluche, normally incapable of putting together one sentence without profuse scatology, was also blunt: "I prefer chaos to another seven years of Giscard. We must overhaul the constitution."

Coluche was born Michel Colucci, but adopted the clown-like stage-name and uses it in his campaigning. The campaign itself would be utterly insignificant but for major coverage from the liberal press outlets *Le Monde* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, the latter the unofficial press of the French socialists. The *New York Times*, which has given the comedian more coverage than the president, quotes Coluche boasting that his campaign is not serious, but intended to erupt what he calls the "alienation" of the French population.

Ironically, but not accidentally, it is the most feudal of all Western regimes, the British, that is spearheading the attack on Giscard and the Fifth Republic for alleged abuse of power worthy of a would-be monarch. It was also in London that Jacobin terrorist leaders Danton and

Marat went to get their marching orders in 1791 during the French Revolution. And it is a rerun of this kind of Jacobin mob rule, which so disrupted France's emerging industrial-capitalist order, that the Socialist International in particular wants to restore in France. Speaking to a Princeton University audience Dec. 12, Socialist Party leader Michel Rocard, who only recently withdrew his own presidential campaign to make room for colleague Mitterrand, declared that France has some experience in "getting rid of kings" and warned that France "is an explosive country when nothing changes."

Strange alliance in politics

The Socialist International has been provided with a partner to carry out this operation in the person of Jacques Chirac, who otherwise parades as a believer in "law and order." According to sources in Giscard's Republican Party, "Chirac can create enormous damage and he knows it." Other sources, in Chirac's own factionally split Gaullist Party (*Rassemblement pour la République*), have identified his *modus operandi* in the following terms. Knowing that another seven-year term in office for Giscard would effectively destroy the RPR as a political machine and consolidate Giscardian power for at least the following decade, Chirac is determined to play the role of political wrecker, hoping to bring Mitterrand to power in the elections. Then, Chirac has been advised, it will be only a few years at most before economic and other crises will collapse Mitterrand's regime, and Chirac can come in "on a white horse" to restore order.

This is the twisted logic that has been imposed on Chirac—whose intellectual powers are inversely proportional to his political ambitions—by his campaign manager, Charles Pasqua. A Corsican, Pasqua is an old-time fellow-traveler of the Socialist International—not politically, but in its extracurricular activities, notably drug trafficking. According to numerous accounts which have never been legally contested, as commercial director for exports of the Marseilles-based liquor company Ricard, Pasqua was the immediate boss of Ricard's Canadian representative, Jean Venturi. Official

U.S. investigations made public in the 1960s described Jean Venturi as a leading exporter of heroin to the United States, while his brother Dominique Venturi worked closely with the Socialist Party Mayor of Marseilles, Gaston Defferre, who has managed to stay in power throughout the postwar period only by virtue of his connections to the local heroin mob.

Giscard aloof?

So far, Giscard has mounted no open counteroffensive to speak of. Hoping that his political enemies will somehow be destroyed in the fray, he has so far refused to even announce whether he will, in fact, run for another term. Meanwhile, he has put a stop to the flow of illusory opinion polls predicting a large margin of victory for him against Mitterrand or Chirac, and adopted an extremely low profile. Without explanation, Giscard canceled a trip to Metz, in the heart of the industrial Lorraine region, and has not scheduled any of his usual monthly hour-long television broadcasts for the next two months.

Giscard's enemies have given every indication that they do not intend to let up on the pressure. Four hours before the president's arrival at the airport of Guadeloupe in the French West Indies on Dec. 28, a powerful bomb exploded there. Responsibility was claimed by an "Armed Liberation Group." It remains to be seen whether this has alerted Giscard that not only his political future but also his physical survival may depend on his taking the offensive now.

What Time readers didn't get in Europe

Under the headline "The Man Who Would Be King," Time magazine Dec. 22 published an article which warned Giscard that, whether or not he gets re-elected, he can still be watergated by the French press. The article, excerpted below, did not appear in Time's European edition.

After six years [in office], a markedly different Giscard has emerged.

Where he once delighted in gunning his Citroen through Paris traffic to lose his police escort for the evening, Giscard is now nearly as distant and imperious as Louis XIV. . . . His relationship with the press has shifted just as sharply. . . .

Giscard's political opposition is scattered and demoralized, and there is little chance that a Gallic Watergate will prevent his re-election. So far, no one is accusing the

president of breaking the law. But some members of parliament are now insisting that his sweeping power over the media should be reduced. With the *Le Monde* case pending [Justice Minister Peyrefitte ordered charges brought against its editors for undermining the independence of the judiciary system with some of their articles—D.S.], and with the French press united as never before against him on the issue, the president may do well to remember a lesson of history: the original Watergate did not prevent an American President from being re-elected either—but the matter did not end there.

The London Economist blasts Fifth Republic

Reprinted in the Baltimore Sun Dec. 28, The Economist's Dec. 27 article "Giscard's power invites abuse" was most explicit that it is the Fifth Republic—because of the powers it puts in the hand of the president—that is the target of the attacks against Giscard. Here are some excerpts:

The presidency of the Fifth Republic that General Charles de Gaulle created in 1958, to rescue France from the shambles of the previous parliament-based system, gives Mr. Giscard d'Estaing an astonishing freedom of action. Unlike an American president, he does not have to coax and cajole a Congress entrenched behind the parapet of constitutionally separate powers.

"Unlike the British prime minister—remember James Callaghan—he cannot be removed by a parliamentary vote of no confidence. Unlike Helmut Schmidt in Germany, he is not shackled to a coalition partner who can prevent him from going too far. Unlike Arnaldo Forlani in Italy and Zenko Suzuki in Japan, he does not have to ride the neighing circus horses of his own party's fractious factions. . . .

The [French] president hires and fires the prime minister, dissolves parliament if he wishes (and can bypass it by calling cut-to-measure referendums), and can rule by emergency decree if he judges that France's institutions are in danger. He keeps daily control over every aspect of government policy. And all this, it may be, for 14 years. . . .

If Mr. Giscard d'Estaing does get re-elected, he could earn the gratitude of future Frenchmen by re-examining the powers of the presidency. There is an argument for reducing the term of office from seven years to, say, five or, if not, for making it a one-term job; for re-allocating the balance of power between president and parliament; or for a mixture.