

Report from Paris by Philip Golub

Elections mean major changes

Raymond Barre, at the other end of the political spectrum, is Swiss bankers' chosen successor to Mitterrand.

If present trends persist, as they undoubtedly will, the March 1986 legislative elections in France will bring to power a coalition of nominally right-wing opposition parties led by the Gaullist RPR. Polls indicate that the opposition parties will receive over 60% of the vote, while the presently ruling Socialist Party is said to be hovering around 25%.

The Socialists have been attempting to minimize the extent of a defeat which they consider virtually inevitable. They recently introduced partially-proportional elections, in a major departure from traditional election practice under the Fifth Republic, which multiplied the legislative results of the victorious parties. At the same time, the Socialists have unashamedly promoted the emergence of the populist National Front to undercut the RPR, which remains the single largest party in the country. It is not expected, however, that these maneuvers stand much chance of success: Divide and conquer maneuvers will have more impact upon the 1988 presidential elections than on the upcoming legislative tests.

A dual power situation will thus become reality in 1986—unprecedented in the history of the Fifth Republic, founded in 1958 by General de Gaulle. The constitution of 1958 created a presidential republic in which the legislative branch was made into the guarantor and implementer of presidential policy, retaining strong

independent privileges and powers of control, but not of initiation of policy. Nonetheless, a strong and stable presidency depended on a clear parliamentary majority.

In 1986, the situation will be entirely novel. The parliamentary majority will be in direct confrontation with the executive. Mitterrand will be the President of a country whose parliament is bitterly antagonistic to him.

The President has declared that he will retain full control over French foreign and security policy, the most hotly contested point of his regime. But constitutional and legal niceties aside, France will suddenly have two foreign and security policies as well as two economic and social policies.

Well informed circles in Paris say that the RPR will demand the posts of Minister of the Interior and Defense in the new coalition, which will place them in control of police and affairs pertaining to international security interests (New Caledonia, Africa, cooperation with NATO, etc.) It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine anything but a rapidly mushrooming conflict between the presidency and the government under these conditions. Most recently the RPR as well as ex-President Giscard d'Estaing endorsed the idea of French-American and European-American cooperation on the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative, and strongly criticized Mitterrand's substitute Eureka program. At the same time, police and security cir-

cles linked to the opposition have been violently critical of the Socialists' appeasement of international terrorists.

The latter conflict has virtually become an area of undeclared war. While the French foreign ministry under guidance from the Elysée has protected European terrorists hiding in France and has tried to negotiate with Islamic Jihad (among others), the DST and parts of the DGSE (respectively domestic and foreign intelligence) have been doing their best to sabotage these discreet negotiations. The DST appears to have won the latest round in the fight: One of the leaders of the FARL Lebanese terrorists, Georges Abdallah Ibrahim, was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment, though the government sought to free him in exchange for French hostages who remain captive in Beirut.

While the change of government will have important effects on European and international politics in the short term, the overriding question of the presidential elections remains open. A large-scale effort is being organized by the Swiss banks, parts of Anglo-Saxon banking circles, and the Trilateral Commission to put Raymond Barre into power. Barre, honorary president of the Geneva Association, the largest insurance think tank in the world, has long been the darling of the international banking community. He is a member of the international board of Banco di Lavoro and a long-standing member of the Trilateral Commission. In keeping with this pedigree, Barre is considered to be Moscow's candidate for 1988, a fact which coheres with his repeated pleas in favor of détente and European-Soviet cooperation. The financial elites (Schlumberger, Gervais-Danone, etc.) who backed Mitterrand in 1981 have found a new candidate on the other side of the political spectrum. Barre is Mitterrand's chosen successor.