

Report from Paris by Christine Schier

Dissidents gain in municipal polls

In the French municipal elections, candidates for the Free French, running for the first time, got excellent results.

There were two noteworthy aspects to the municipal elections held on March 12 in France: the continued high rate of abstentions—the lowest voter turnout in a postwar local election—and the success of candidates deemed new or outside the mainstream parties. All over the country, the “dissidents” brought in the votes.

In this context, the percentages received by candidates of the Rassemblement France Libre are most encouraging; this brand-new electoral coalition, supported by the European Labor Party and friends of Lyndon LaRouche, ran candidates for the first time in some 20 small communes, receiving between 13 and 88% of the vote. The French electorate is demanding new ideas, and has shown its—sometimes reckless—willingness to vote for whoever puts them forth.

The two previous municipal elections, in 1977 and 1983, took place in a much more politically polarized climate, but even then, abstentions were relatively very high at 21.1% and 21.6%. This time, they reached 30%. Of course, one might consider this an improvement compared to the 34.2% abstention rate in the legislative elections in June 1988, or the whopping 50.9% in the cantonal elections of last September. However, contrary to many other countries, municipal elections in France tend to raise the greatest passions after the presidential race, precisely because they touch on local issues with which the voters are most familiar.

French voters have cast a protest vote: first, by approving the “dissi-

dents” in the big parties—most notably Robert Vigoureux in Marseille and Michel Noir in Lyon; second, by giving the “Greens” more than 10% in some 60 cities; finally, by maintaining the National Front in some of its strongholds, despite all predictions both by friend and by foe.

The traditional political “barons” of the big cities no longer have the confidence even of their own party. To give a few highlights: Raymond Barre, ex-presidential hopeful and French spokesman for the Trilateral Commission and the insurance cartels, was beaten in the sixth sector of Lyon, and Michel Noir, ex-trade minister of the Chirac government who profiles himself as a young and aggressive free thinker independent from formal party structures, got 51.6% of the votes, crushing the mayor of Lyon, Collomb. Pierre Joxe, the arrogant interior minister of the Rocard government, was trounced by voters in Paris. In Marseille, ex-Socialist Robert Vigoureux—who refused to withdraw his candidacy in favor of the candidate hand-picked by the national leadership—made a very strong showing, since he represented a more authentic current of local politics, free from the Parisian bureaucracy.

As for the ecologist vote, they had similarly high scores in the municipal elections of 1977, only to sink back down afterwards. Unlike the German or Italian Greens, the French ones are a very weak movement, who make no national campaigns against nuclear energy or the Force de Frappe, but intervene on local issues which “irk” the voters. While their national lead-

er, Antoine Waechter, refused to call on ecologists to vote left or right in the second round, locally they will rally in some cases to the Socialist Party. If their returns are protest votes *par excellence*, it must still be said that they benefited from the recent scare propaganda over the ozone hole.

The results of the Rassemblement France Libre, who ran some “test candidacies” in rural areas of the Aisne, the Marne, and the Ardennes ranged from 13 to 88%, showing voters’ response to the ideas they put forth—be it against the food cartels and for a vigorous increase in agricultural production, against Europe 1992 and for strong industrial growth in sovereign nations, or against malthusianism and for a grand design of space colonization. The prospects seem promising for the RFL slate in the European parliamentary elections.

There will be little competition in the programmatic domain. Neither regional “barons” nor “protestors” have an alternative to offer. The power base of the “barons” comes from their ability to manage and administer, not from their ideas in national or European politics. The “protestors” have built their campaigns around single issues—such as opposing immigration or protecting nature.

The Rassemblement France Libre, though, is a clear break with the French establishment. The RFL is a gathering and not simply one more political party, whose name evokes the grand struggle of the Free French led by General de Gaulle during World War II. At this time, when the French State is attacked from without by the risks of a New Yalta sell-out and the supranational dictates of the European Commission, and from within by the sheer lack of national leaders, this appeal to the strengthening of the nation state will be heeded by the voters.