

privatization policy, the real issue was unemployment. So long as these companies remain public, the workers are, in principle, guaranteed their jobs. According to reports, more workers (75%) joined the strike at the national telephone company, France Telecom, than had been the case in 1968.

On Oct. 18, the Air France workers protested against an austerity package which would result in 4,000 layoffs and wage reductions. Air France is going bankrupt, like most airlines, due to international deregulation policies; it rents its airplanes, and recently even sold its own central office building. It is now taking on the only thing left: its labor force. Its restructuring plan calls not only for people to be laid off through various pre-retirement schemes, but also for cuts in extra pay for overtime night work and cuts in compensation benefits for weekend travel. A worker earning 7,000 francs per month could thus take a wage cut of some 477 francs.

For over a week, workers blocked most domestic Air France flights, in a strike that cost the company nearly 1 billion francs. They went so far as to occupy the runways—a first in the history of air travel. Fearing the spread of the ferment—Rural Coordination and other opponents of GATT had called to support the strike—the government withdrew the restructuring plan entirely, provoking Air France President Bernard Attali to resign.

French observer warns of 'New Middle Ages'

by Mark Burdman

As the political-economic crisis in France, Europe, and most of the rest of the world worsens by the day, leading spokesmen for the French political class have begun to speak openly about the depths of this crisis and to insist that France launch initiatives to reverse the process of degeneration and decay. One important manifestation of this attitude is a book released in early November, authored by French businessman-intellectual Alain Minc, entitled *The New Middle Ages (Le Nouveau Moyen Age)*. The thesis of the book, in its essence, has received an important endorsement from European Community President Jacques Delors, who is also a Frenchman.

Minc formerly directed the CERUS financial group in Paris. He has assumed the role, in recent years, of the "pen"

for the center-left faction of the French establishment, associated with the daily *Le Monde* and other "trend-setting" publications. What he says reflects less his personal opinion, than the consensus of an influential policy grouping within the French elites.

Feudalism and tribal warfare

From preliminary accounts available in the French and British press, Minc's main concern is that the world is heading into a new feudalism, similar in its basic features to the most precarious moments of medieval times. The world today is increasingly marked by tribal conflicts, chaos and misery, uncontrolled armed bands, the collapse in the belief in reason as a basis for making judgments, the return of irrational fears and superstitions, and the assertiveness of primitive impulses. We witness the emergence of "gray societies," where authority has broken down and given way to the rule of local warlords, to the "mafia" and to cutthroat economic buccaneers who lay waste under the banner of the "free market." In some cases, matters have so degenerated that entire nations are becoming "black holes," where the classical notions of territory, state, and rules of the game no longer apply, or *terrae incognitae*, as is the case in parts of Africa, Burma, and elsewhere. Also noteworthy, he writes, is the disappearance of the taboo of the inviolability of national borders.

All this, in Minc's view, represents a significant threat to Europe, a situation that is, in some ways, riskier than the kinds of threats which prevailed during the Cold War.

Much of what Minc is talking about echoes the warnings made over years by Lyndon and Helga LaRouche, and by this magazine, that the world is rapidly plunging toward a "New Dark Age," unless the policy axioms and postulates that have prevailed within the transatlantic policy establishment during the greater part of the past three decades are changed.

France could be a 'civilizing force'

According to Minc, in this situation, France, with its resistance to "law of the jungle economics" and its social cohesion, can be a civilizing force. He calls for a "bold pessimism," an "active" response, to replace the "passive optimism" that might have prevailed in recent years.

Writing in the Nov. 6-7 weekend issue of *Le Monde*, the EC's Delors stated, "I totally share [Minc's] fundamental intuition," especially that the "historical optimism" that might have prevailed in former times, is no longer applicable today.

It is not certain, however, whether either Minc or Delors is willing to enunciate a clear and effective policy to reverse the slide into a "New Middle Ages," along the lines of the LaRouche Paris-Berlin-Vienna "Productive Triangle" of development for Europe. In his review, Delors implicitly re-

jects the LaRouche approach, when he answers those who criticize the European Community for having responded ineffectually to the situation in eastern-central Europe following the collapse of communism in 1989-90, by saying that he does not believe in "miracle recipes."

Specters of Joan of Arc and Colbert

One indication that Minc has hit a raw nerve, is the agitated response that the book received in the London *Times*. Paris correspondent Charles Bremner, writing Nov. 8, fretted that *The New Middle Ages* was receiving "sensational promotion" among what he calls France's "chattering classes," who "fear a return to medieval chaos, with society dominated by local barons, the mafia, and cutthroat economic bureaucracy." The article was headlined "France Fends Off World's Medieval Ways: Paris Prepares to Rescue Humanity from Its Dark Destiny." It was accompanied by a drawing of a young woman in chains, looking to the heavens, and hovering over a cathedral: Joan of Arc, whom the English burned at the stake in 1431.

Bremner began his article: "While European ministers prepared over the weekend for their umpteenth attempt to speed the [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] world trade accord despite French intransigence, the chattering classes of Paris were worrying about the Middle Ages. More precisely, they were wondering if France, with its system of powerful central authority, might not be ideally placed to lead the world away from a return to medieval chaos. . . . What is noteworthy about M. Minc's pessimistic book, and the surrounding fuss, is its illustration of the gulf that divides the Gallic world view from the outside perspective. While many foreigners see France as a trouble-maker afflicted by demons from its darker past, opinion at home is convinced the country is a bastion of humanity whose ills are the work of barbarous foreign forces."

Earlier, on Oct. 27, Bremner had written a biting article about the fact that French President François Mitterrand and the government of Prime Minister Edouard Balladur had reversed policy and given in to the demands of striking Air France workers, soon after the workers had received support from French farm organizations. Bremner fretted that Mitterrand and Balladur were correctly reading the mood of the French population, and that the French nation was reverting to its tradition of economic dirigism. "Dirigism," he noted, has its roots in the 17th-century policies and theories of King Louis XIV's adviser Jean-Baptiste Colbert. The same approach made France "so prosperous" when it was applied under President Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s. Bremner complained that "France still has the most state-dominated economy in the G-7 group of rich nations," and demanded that supporters of "free trade" act to "change the culture" of the country. The British correspondent characterized tentative steps toward a revival of dirigism as a "flight from economic reality."

The U.N. embargo is still killing Iraq's children

by Felicity Arbuthnot

The author is an Irish journalist.

I was last in Iraq in May 1992. It was hard to imagine that conditions could deteriorate. In a country where in 1990, U.N. figures estimated that 92% of the population had access to clean water and 93% to free and sophisticated health care, medicines were virtually unattainable, operations had been carried out without anesthetics for two years, and Unicef estimated that 100,000 civilians a year were dying as a direct result of the embargo—mainly children under five, the vulnerable, and the elderly.

Food prices had soared such that staples—pulses, beans, rice—were sold in tiny packages, by the gram. Traditionally, these are sold in 50 kilo (110 pound) bags.

In July of this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. noted "with deep concern, all the commonly recognized signs of pre-famine conditions being in place." Further, that "large numbers of Iraqis now have food intakes lower than those of the populations in the disaster-stricken African countries."

That was four months ago, this is *Apocalypse Now*. Food has risen in price 1,000 times.

With U.S. dollars, one can buy black market dinars: 10,000 dinars to \$100. A ten-inch-high wad which fills one with shame and echoes chillingly the suitcases of notes needed to buy bread in Germany after 1945.

For the Iraqi people, with no dollars, the rate is 36 dinars to the dollar. In context, an average monthly salary is 200-300 dinars, approximately \$6-9. This is a "looking-glass" world. The cheapest fill-up on earth can be had in Iraq, just cents per tank. A bottle of water is \$35.

In the foyer of the Rashid Hotel, former home in Iraq to so many foreign visitors, is one of the most magnificent displays of beautiful artifacts ever to be seen: jewelry, paintings, crystal, porcelain, superb, rare antique boxes, chandeliers. They are the belongings of the middle classes, displayed in the hope that they might be sold for dollars to the few foreign visitors who now reach Iraq. Living for a few more weeks. The poor have no antiques. (There are less visible auctions all over town.)