The French Elections — And The Fight for Socialism

Robert Goldstein

The French working class will learn some valuable political lessons with the election of Socialist Party leader Francois Mitterand to the French presidency. Having swept a reformist socialist-democrat into the highest office in the country on a very popular program, they will learn that their demands cannot be won within the framework of monopoly capitalism. And, under certain circumstances, they may learn that there can be no peaceful transition to socialism.

For the first time in 23 years, France has a president identified with the left. And the reasons are fairly clear. After seven years under Valery Giscard d’Estaing, the French masses knew they could not stand another seven.

When he took office in 1974, in a narrow victory over Mitterand, it was all posturing for a bright future. Unemployment was down, inflation low and prosperity right around the corner.

But in 1981, the French workers and oppressed are groaning under the strain of the worst economic crisis French has seen since the 1930’s. The French workers danced through the night at the Bastille, the historic spot of the overthrow of the French capitalists — and Mitterand’s election will be a great political education for the French working class and oppressed.

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Election & Transitional Demands

Mitterand’s stunningly large victory — 46% is stunning by French political standards — brings to the forefront the question of how to mobilize the majority of the people into direct battle with the capitalist class. In an advanced capitalist country, aligning the workers and their allies in such a fashion for the final onslaught against the capitalist system is no easy matter. They cannot be mobilized on the basis of fighting for socialism or even on the basis of overthrowing the government. This is because they make revolution not based on preconceived ideals or ideas but based on necessity. The masses make revolution based on the fact they can no longer live in the old way, under the brutal conditions of capitalist dictatorship.

In an advanced capitalist country it is extremely difficult to discover the demands that will mobilize the masses as one against the capitalist class and its representative, the government. Bourgeois democracy divides the masses, separating their fights into different streamlets of struggle. Especially now, when capitalism is highly destabilized demands must be put forward which will concentrate the masses extreme hatred for capitalism and which they will take up as their own and organize around. The demands must also be formulated in such a way they cannot be coopted under capitalism. Once the demands are — continued on page 13

End the Criminal Rule of the U.S. Monopoly Capitalist Class, Fight for Socialism!
The Proletariat and Oppressed People and Nations of the World, Unite!

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The Mean Decade

Beginning with this issue, we welcome David Armstrong as a regular contributor to the Workers Viewpoint. His column, American Journal, is run in a diverse group of 30 alternative and college papers around the country.

David Armstrong

If the 1970’s, with its preoccupation with self, was the Me Decade, the 1980s, following the conservative obsession with reversing the gains of the past 50 years for the disenfranchised, may go down in history as the Mean Decade. Both impulses for getting yours, and keeping others from getting theirs — are selfish. But while the fashionable selfishness of the seventies took the form of apotolic withdrawal, the eighties are shaping up as a time to lash out.

With Ronald Reagan’s punitive budget, mean­ness is being written into law. The natural world is to be cut and burned for profit, food stamps denied to hungry people, affirmative action stalled, public legal services dismantled, funding for the arts squashed, Social Security wounded, perhaps fatally. The campaign pledge to maintain the system as a “safety net” for the elderly poor. That promise, it turns out, is worth about as much as a 1981 dollar.

Why, even corporate executives claim they are being squeezed by inflation. According to a survey by Ernst & Whinney, a New York accounting firm, over half of a group of execs with average yearly incomes of $88,000 complain that their standard of living is declining. Twenty-three percent say they are tightening their belts at home and on the job. You do wonder how they get by.

In reality, the Reagan administration is a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich, and has been so since day one, when the mint coinks and top hats crowded Washington for the Inaugura­tion. Not since the mean-spirited Republican trium­virate of Harding, Coolidge and Hoover has privilege been so nakedly enshrined in the White House.

No one who has truly followed Reagan’s career as governor of California and stump speaker for General Electric should be surprised at the swiftness and thoroughness with which he has turned the ship of state to the right. Post-election assurances by myopic.seems like James Reston of the New York Times and the Washington Post’s David Broder that Reagan would prove to be a moderate that once he reached Washington have been shown to be transparently false. The president is as he has long been: an ideologue of the far right.

In theory, conservatives such as Reagan oppose high government spending and extensive government regulation. In practice, as the early months of the Reagan administration have demonstrated, conserv­atives oppose only those limits on spending and regulation. Military spending — let’s not call it defense, no one is attacking us — is at all-time high. Budget cutter David Stockman has asked

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American Journal

...French Election

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mulated and the masses pick them up, they will learn through their own experiences that if they want a better life they must get rid of the old order. This is the lesson of the Russian Revolution. The Russian workers and peasants did not consciously fight for socialism. They fought for peace (and have been made against our eastern neighbor,” and sing­ling out the Church called for “internal peace,” citing a “threat of national nihilism to cover their support for the social-imperialist policy of the Soviet Union. The utter stupidity of this line is clear: in fact a Soviet invasion would arouse anti-Soviet nationalism to levels unseen in Poland’s history. One argument the Line of March makes for saying that the Polish workers’ movement is reactionary concerns the role of the Catholic Church in Poland. An estimated 80% of Poles consider themselves Catholic and the Church has extensive organization in the country. Lech Walesa, the recognized leader of Solidarity, considers himself Catholic.

The truth is that the Catholic hierarchy, including Cardinal Wyszyński, has been calling on the workers for “moderation.” In early December, according to Time, the Church called for “internal peace,” citing a “threat to the freedom and statehood of the Fatherland.” A Church spokesman, the Rev. Alojzy Orszulik, later criticized the “noisy and irresponsible statements which have been made against our eastern neighbor,” and single­ out Jacek Kuroń, a leading dissident, for censure. The Church knows very well that whatever its ideological influence, it is weak politically. Government control over the church is extensive, with the power of veto over church appointments to key posts. Though the government refrains from attacking it openly—which would be politically incorrect as well as fuel the fire of resistance at this point—the government control of resources and the threat of repression keeps the church in check.

Lech Walesa and other leaders of Solidarity have been using the contradiction between the church and the government as a bargaining chip. As Solidarity is barely beginning to get organized, this is reinforced by the fact that the government control of resources and the threat of repression keeps the church in check.

A Soviet invasion, as called for by the Line of March, would prevent any real rectification of the revisionist line of the PUPW leadership. As one PUPW member said, “If the Soviet Union invades, any revisionists will be out of business. The masses are listening to our voices, not to those of the revisionists.”

The Line of March is not a regular column in the Workers Viewpoint. The Weekly is printed on a weekly basis and it is impossible to include a weekly column in all issues of the paper. This is the first issue of the Weeklies in which a regular column appears.

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