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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 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 Mitterrand to the French presidency. Having swept a reformist social-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 promises 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

a higher minimum wage, a 35 hour work week, a lower retirement age. Additionally, he calls for nationalizing eleven of the country's industrial groups, all remaining private banks and insurance companies and a government program to immediately create 160,000 public jobs.

That his is the most radical of all the European Social-Democratic programs is no accident. It is based on the historical militancy of the French working class for the desire of the social-democrats to be relevant.

The turbulent events of 1968, when the overthrow of the French capitalists was a real possibility, swept aside the reformist social-democratic movement. The masses would have no truck with a party vitally interested in compromising with other reformists and against revolutionaries. The Socialist Party dissolved. It reformed in 1969.

The SP knocked around for a few years after its reformation, trying to unite the non-communist left. For example, Mitterand tried to unite with the Radical Socialists, a small party which, despite their name, have nothing to do with socialism and lean more toward the center of the French political spectrum. But it had little success both in uniting with them and with attracting new members to its ranks. In fact the people and organizations the SP appealed to were anti-communist.

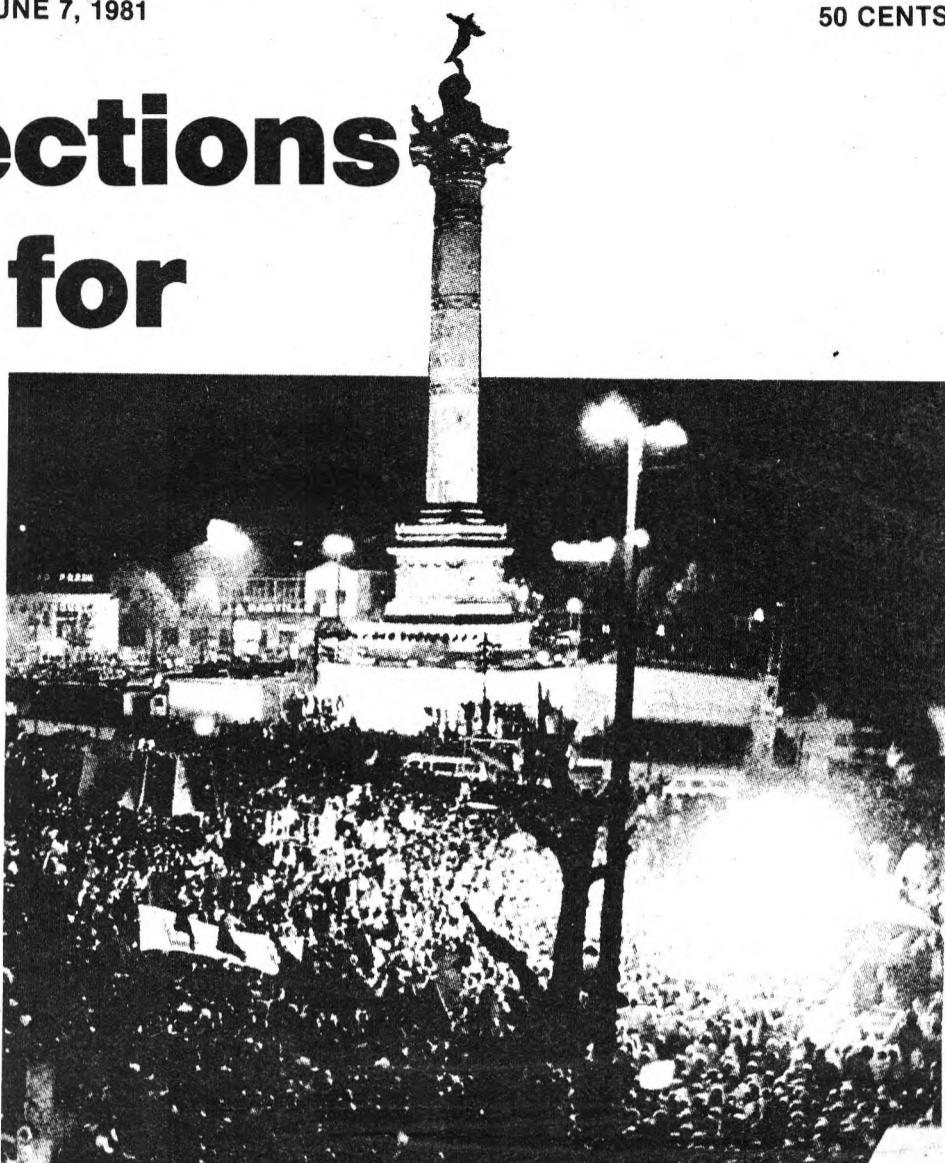
Its dismal showing in the 1969 elections showed the temperment of the French masses. By 1971, the Socialist Party had given up its efforts of forming an alliance with the non-communist left. Whereas the Social-Democratic Party of Germany, a party which has headed governments before, differs little from capitalist parties even in appearance, Mitterand's socialists have never formally renounced socialism, and at least in words treats it as more than an abstract ideal.

History of Program

Mitterand and the Socialist Party soon found that if they wanted to capture the mood of the French working class, they had to move to the left. That is when they struck a bargain with the revisionist Communist Party of France.

Mitterand's election program is based on the 1972 Common Program, the Socialist Party's and Communist Party's joint statement. This legislative program, to be implemented over a 5-year parliamentary session, was a program for a Socialist-Communist coalition government. It was a plan for peaceful transition to socialism. And although the formal alliance of these two parties broke up after the 1974 presidential election, the Common Program still forms the basis for Mitterand's election promises.

The whole conception of the Common Program — and Mitterand's, too



French workers danced through the night at the Bastille, the historic spot of the French revolution. Mitterrand's election will be a great political education for the French working class and oppressed.

— is gradualists. The Socialist Party and the Communist Party, despite their disagreements, agree on one crucial aspect of the program. Not only will it, in their view, take more than five years to accomplish their promises, but it will be done by consensus with the capitalists.

Mitterand, already backing off his militant promises, stated that his sweeping nationalization of industry, the banks and the insurance companies will be realized only where the opportunity arises and only by mutual agreement. Nationalization of the highly profitable banks and industries will not be forced on the capitalists; it will only be done with their consent! What capitalist will freely agree to having his profitable business taken from him?

Mitterand's hedging on these popular demands are an indication of what the masses may have in store during the next seven years. What action he plans to take on his social promises also remains to be seen.

In addition, even if Mitterand had intentions of implementing his program, there is no way many of the demands can be realized under capitalism. There is no way, for example, that all the banks can be nationalized.

Finance capital is the lifeblood of the monopoly capitalist system. The capitalist class will encourage nationalization of many stagnant and unprofitable enterprises and even whole industries (such as steel in France or the railroads in the U.S.) The capitalists will even let many financial institutions be nationalized; the French banking industry is 75% nationalized with only the biggest and most profitable still in private hands.

But it is precisely this 25% that the monopoly capitalist class will fight to keep in private hands; they will resort

to all sorts of tricks and intrigue — both legal and illegal — to keep this from happening. And unless Mitterand is organizing the working class, all-aroundly preparing them to back up their demands by overthrowing the capitalists class, these popular demands will not be achieved.

Election & Transitional Demands

Mitterand's stunningly large victory — 4% 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 for-

continued on page 13



Francois Mitterrand, the new President of France.

good times Giscard promised turned sour long ago. Inflation is running at 14% a year. Unemployment stands at 8% with 1.7 million idle workers.

"Enough of Giscard!" the French masses said. "It's time for a change."

Masses' Temperment Shapes Race

The vehicles for this change turned out to be oddly enough, Francois Mitterrand, the reformist Socialist Party of France and a program of legislation which promises an eventual peaceful transition to socialism.

Mitterrand's program calls for relief from the economic crisis. He proposes

...French Election

continued from page 16

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 end of World War I), bread and land to the tiller. After advancing these demands and being disappointed by a succession of reformist governments, they revolted under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Through

their quest for their demands they learned that only a government headed by the Bolsheviks could satisfy them.

Unite to Hang

Communists can draw many lessons from the French presidential race. Mitterand's election shows the importance of finding the transition or approach to socialist revolution, as Lenin said. The vote for Mitterand and his program is one indication of the masses' ferment and is one indication of what they demand. He must put up or shut up, so to

speak. It matters not that Mitterand is a reformist and that in all likelihood he has no intention of carrying out his promises. The election results are a stop on the French masses' leftward course and is part of their political schooling.

Genuine communists must assist this political awakening in every way possible. Communists must support these demands, explaining all the while that they are unachievable under capitalism. And communists must support whoever articulates these demands.

In this case it means supporting Mitterand. But it must be done in such a way that the workers and oppressed become clearer about the extreme limitations of capitalism and the sellout nature of the reformists. With each and every demand, Mitterand must be held accountable for his actions. In short, he must be supported as a noose supports a hanged man, as Lenin said. This way the workers and oppressed get drawn into the fight and become clearer on what they want and how to get it. □