



Wide World Photos

*The failure of the Communist and Socialist Parties to come together denied the Left its chance of victory in the March 1978 French elections. Socialist leader François Mitterrand (left) and Communist leader Georges Marchais (right) are shown voting their separate ways during the first round of balloting.*

ket. Moreover, both parties have launched "buy French" campaigns. Both are in favour of a purely French striking force and of what is called an "all-directional" defence. They are strongly opposed to close co-operation between France and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, although in principle they are willing to have France belong to the Atlantic Alliance. Both parties seek to champion groups in society that are on the decline: small businessmen, small farmers, the least-skilled members of the working class and industries that are in difficulty (textiles, coal mining, steel). These parties also stand for authoritarian values and for law and order.

The *socialists* and *liberals*, on the other hand, are strongly in favour of an open-door attitude towards Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, attentive to ecological problems but in favour of introducing the latest technology and of competition in industry. These parties are competing with one another at the centre of the political chessboard for the various strata comprising the ambitious, dynamic middle and upper classes of French society, a society that during the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies underwent profound changes that have not been noticed by many observers who are perpetuating the myths of the "closed society" and "the French sickness".

The supposedly surprising results of the March 1978 legislative elections can be explained much more easily if one lays aside the myths that pervade what is written about French society and if one considers not only the Left-Right duality but also the "open-closed" dimension. The uninominal, majority, two-ballot method of

voting favours a Left-Right polarization by forcing conservatives and liberals, on the one hand, and socialists and Communists, on the other, to form alliances, at least for electoral purposes. The "open-closed" dimension cannot have political expression; it would be impossible for the Socialist Party, a fragile and recently-formed coalition consisting of various democratic-socialist elements, to conclude an alliance with the liberals without falling apart. This was why President Giscard d'Estaing, who has clearly perceived the double polarization in French politics (Left-Right and "open-closed") was in favour of adopting a proportional method of voting that would have enabled the Socialist Party to do without the Communist alliance. But in this he was, and still is, opposed by the RPR, headed by Jacques Chirac, the authoritarian Mayor of Paris, who, in his efforts to maintain his influence on the Government, stands only to gain if the Socialist Party has no alternative to an alliance — even a limited one — with the Communist Party. The RPR can count on the tacit complicity of the Communist Party, which officially claims to favour proportional voting but is vigorously opposed to a plan that would deprive it of a first-rate means of bringing pressure to bear on the Socialist Party.

The victory of the conservative-liberal coalition in the legislative elections of March 12 and 19 last has therefore given the Government headed by Prime Minister Raymond Barre a renewed term of office. The UDF (the pivot of the Government coalition) demonstrated its strength by getting Jacques Chaban-Delmas elected to the Presidency of the National Assembly in