

plan and that only through state control can the banking sector be forced to take account of the long term investment needs of the French economy. Second, they argue that the nationalization program will help the French "re-conquer the internal market," that is, claw back a larger share of the economy from foreign firms. For Canadians, now in the midst of a debate about the relationship between the Foreign Investment Review Agency and the National Energy Plan and our declining economy, the attempt of the French to determine their own economic priorities by increasing state control of the economy should be of some interest. The difference is, of course, that the French have much more leverage than the Canadians over the economy.

A third reason for nationalization has to do with economic democracy. From the President on down, the French Socialists never tire of repeating that political democracy is an empty shell without social justice. The right to cast an occasional vote at election time must, they argue, be complemented by the right of workers to participate in decision-making at all levels of the work place. This is why by 1984 nationalized firms will be run by tripartite management boards consisting of representatives from the unions, the government and consumers. The difficulty, however, is that some of the trade unions, particularly the usually pro-Socialist Force Ouvrière, have criticized Socialist plans for economic democracy, seeing in them an attempt to co-opt the trade unions into a neo-corporatist arrangement. For many Socialists, however, economic democracy is inextricably linked to two additional major themes in the Socialist program — decentralization and solidarity.

Since coming to power the Socialist government has worked revolutionary changes in local government. Hitherto the mayors and municipal councils of the 38,000 communes in France had been subject to the authority of the centrally-appointed Prefect. No matter how big or small the city, almost every decision they made had to be approved by the Prefect. Since the recent decentralization bill passed the National Assembly, however, the Prefects have been stripped of some of their major powers. Local municipal budgets no longer need his approval ("his" is incorrect here since the Socialists for the first time appointed women Prefects), the departmental executive power hitherto vested in the Prefect has now been given over to the departmental general council, and even the title "Prefect" has been changed to "Commissioner of the Republic."

Solidarity — French style

Both economic democracy and decentralization are policy objectives which fall within the realm of everyday politics. But the notion of solidarity and the creation of a Ministry of National Solidarity is certainly a curious one. And here we come to an area where there has been a happy conjunction between contemporary French Socialist theory and the personality of President Mitterrand. Like other European left wing parties, the French Socialists have recently paid a lot of attention to the idea of linking social and economic reform to changes in people's attitudes and values. In the 1920s, Socialists used to argue that only a literate, educated population could be expected to understand and accept the enormous changes that would come about with socialism. More recently, under the influence of the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the European left has argued that all the means of communication and culture have a profound effect on the nature of socialism and on

socialist society. With this in mind the Socialists have begun to reexamine the role of radio, television and the various instruments of culture (book publishing, theatre, cinema) in an attempt to liberate them from what they feel has been the dead hand of capitalism. At the same time, the Ministry of National Solidarity is intended to coordinate the actions of the various social service ministries with a view to getting



Courtesy Embassy of France

President François Mitterrand

the French to act in, and if necessary to make economic sacrifices for, the common interest. This means that, in the name of national solidarity, the better-off will see their taxes rise in order to finance the expanded social security programs. It means that higher-paid civil servants have seen increases in their social security deductions in order to help their colleagues lower in the hierarchy. It means that workers have been asked to curtail wage demands in order to increase national productivity, all in the name of the national interest. The reply of Nicole Questiaux, the Minister of National Solidarity, to a question about the meaning of the term demonstrates the interweaving of the major themes of decentralization, participatory democracy and mutual responsibility:

Solidarity means that together, and in a responsible fashion, people take charge of their affairs, their security and their social needs. Think of those in the nineteenth century who organized themselves into mutual societies to cover themselves against risks, who were the first to imagine that one could contribute according to one's resources, and where a form of redistribution was initiated within a small group.