

FRENCH FALLOUT

Perhaps the first point to be made on the obscure affair of the Rainbow Warrior is that if the Portuguese photographer had not decided to go back into the boat to save his equipment after the first explosion - a decision which led to his death - then whoever decided to blow up the Greenpeace vessel would probably have got away with it. Some speculation in the press, the clash of contradictory hypotheses (in France the KGB would most likely have got the blame), a lot of bitterness among Greenpeace supporters, and the whole thing would have blown over. A chilling thought. As it is Fernando Pereira died, and his death has raised one of the noisiest political scandals in France since the war.

Let's start with a clarification: not all the subsequent participants in the debate following the attack on the Rainbow Warrior - in France and abroad - can be considered to be altruistic searchers after a hidden truth. The affair - France's so-called under-Watergate - has been exploited Right, Left and Centre. Surely the virtuous outcry from the leaders of the French Right must be taken with a pinch of salt: after all, the storing of skeletons in the Fifth Republic cupboard did not start in 1981. The assassination of Ben Barka, the mysterious circumstances surrounding the deaths of such Fifth Republic dignitaries as De Broglie and Boulin, not to mention the long and bloody saga of the RPR hit-team, the SAC, which ended in a gory massacre only a few years back, should disqualify most of those who have been protesting loudest in the RPR and UDF parties. Their only claim to fame in this respect is that they managed to cover up their scandals quite successfully - hence the accusation of amateurism directed against the Socialist government.

What is politically more significant is the way in which the affair has once again uncovered the deep personal and political divisions on the Right. Thus Chirac and the RPR, who believe that the time is not yet ripe to oust the Socialist president, given Chirac's relatively poor rating as presidential candidate in recent opinion polls, have carefully avoided evoking Mitterrand's role in the affair. Touban, RPR general secretary and Chirac's most zealous young lieutenant, has concentrated his attacks on Fabius and the 'bungling' of the operation by the government. On the other hand, Raymond Barre and his supporters within the UDF coalition have been hammering home a virulently

anti-Mitterrand message, hoping thereby to precipitate the longed-for presidential elections (scheduled for 1988) and provide Barre with a historical opportunity to steal a march on Chirac.

Although the Right remains divided, the supporters of the Socialist government are probably more confused and disillusioned than ever. The sinking of the Rainbow Warrior and the ensuing press revelations have certainly undermined the credibility of the government. Perhaps rightly so. After all the Mitterrand-Fabius duo had gone to great pains to project a well-orchestrated public image on the issue of human rights - often flattering in the process the fashionable anti-Sovietism of much of the French intel-

Laurent Fabius, Prime Minister of France.



Charles Hernu, France's former Minister of Defence and victim of the Greenpeace affair.



ligentsia. Their sometimes more than symbolic gestures concerning Poland, Afghanistan, Soviet dissidents or, more recently, South Africa have been largely invalidated by the discovery of the cynical *realpolitik* of their covert handling of political opposition to French nuclear testing in the Pacific. This is not to say that the political impact of the scandal has been immediate in concrete terms: there has not been any significant shift in the recent popularity ratings of the president or the government (they're pretty bad as it is). However they have lost much of the precious political capital they had accumulated on these issues in France and abroad. (In a recent session of the UN, Roland Dumas, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, had to cut out most of the references to human rights in his speech for fear of appearing ridiculous.)

Another problem raised by this affair is the uneasy relationship between the Left in power (however rightward-looking it may be) and the army. One serious hypothesis, which has been advanced by several commentators and not yet invalidated, is that the French secret service, the DGSE, or at least some of its influential members, deliberately botched the sabotage operation in order to embarrass the government and provoke a political crisis. Recent statements by the new head of the DGSE, General Imbot, have done nothing to dissipate such doubts. In any case, it was a secret for nobody that some of the main protagonists in the New Zealand expedition were extremely hostile towards the Socialist government. The call for democratic control and accountability in the army would certainly have raised protests from the pro-military lobby on the Right and within the Left since 1981, but it might also have prevented this (or worse) from happening.

Lastly, the Greenpeace affair has revealed once again the weakness and marginalisation of the peace movement in France. The issues raised by the Greenpeace presence in the Pacific have been virtually ignored by the French press throughout the affair. Worse still, on the Right and in some sectors of the Left (eg, the Socialist daily, *Le Matin*), commentators seized the dubious opportunity to call into question the democratic credentials and the motives of Greenpeace activists, insinuating occult support and the inevitable 'hand of Moscow'. Mitterrand has succeeded in building a solid and uncritical consensus of opinion in favour of the French nuclear deterrent. When the time comes to evaluate the legacy of the Socialist administration surely this will weigh against them?

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