Not Really Failure:
The Success of the Parti Socialiste Government in France, 1981-1986

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Abstract

This thesis examines an especially significant period in French political history. The years 1981 to 1986 were particularly important because, for the first time, the French Socialists controlled the government for more than just a year. The idea of a Socialist, not a Social Democratic, party guided by the same ideology formulated in 1905 captivated the public. The French people, and to some extent the rest of the world, either nervously or eagerly anticipated the outcome of a Socialist party's term in a modern nation. The first years of the Parti Socialiste government are often referred to as an 'experiment,' and they marked the last time a leader of a developed country tried to create a truly socialist economy. The government also tried to apply other ideas that had been perceived as "outdated" to their official policies. This thesis examines why parts of the program developed by the PS fell by the wayside as a result of the Socialists' time in office.

This thesis also examines how the Socialist government achieved despite the setbacks. Some observers emphasize the "failure" of the PS to transform France into a Socialist society. However, as the events discussed in this paper will show, this government was not an abject failure. Failure would have happened if the government had pursued "socialism" for the sake fulfilling Leftist ambitions or clung desperately to initiatives that were no longer suited for country's political climate. The government was actually very successful at evaluating how sensible Socialist ideas were and then adjusting them to respond to the needs of the French people. This thesis also explains how the success of the government led to the success of the entire party, which was considered a more respectable political body by 1986 after its leaders had proven themselves capable of running a country. The PS failed to hold on to all the tenets of the Left, but the alternative was to attain the image of a party that was politically insensible and out of touch with the modern world.

Developing this thesis has required the application of the knowledge I have acquired in all the areas I have focused my studies on during my undergraduate career. Obviously I have used my knowledge of history, my major area of study. I have also used the knowledge I gained in the areas of my two minors. To translate some of my sources, I applied the skills I have acquired studying the French language; to understand the political aspects, I used the knowledge I have gained in European studies. This piece is an accurate representation of my cumulated undergrad work.
For my parents
Introduction

From 1981 until 1986 members of the French socialist party, the Parti Socialiste (PS), under the leadership of the ambitious politician François Mitterrand, held executive and legislative power. Prior to 1981 only two socialists had held the office of Prime Minister. Leon Blum and Guy Mollet each lasted in office for just one year, adding to the French socialists' often dismal history. PS members assumed their new positions with reinvigorated confidence, determined to transform France's society and economy into the Left's long-sought utopia. However, Mitterrand and the PS ministers failed to actualize the party's socialist vision of France. By 1986 the Socialists were endorsing economic, cultural and foreign policies contrary to the original programs of 1981. Instead of forcing unpopular or unwise decisions on the public for the sake of adhering to leftist ideology, or as a refusal to admit the party's initial position had been wrong, PS leaders chose to alter their policies as needed. Government officials did just this in dealing with the economic crisis, the church school dispute and the Greenpeace scandal. The Socialist government did not accomplish much of what the party had planned prior to the elections of 1981, but the government was not totally unsuccessful. The achievements of the PS were found in the government's ability to recognize policy mistakes and adjust its actions effectively.

The PS was a young party in 1981, having emerged twelve years earlier from the old socialist party, the Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). The PS inherited a troubled legacy of ideological incoherence, declining electoral support and ministerial failure. 

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1 In 1936 Leon Blum led the "Popular Front" alliance of the SFIO, the Radical Socialists and the French Communist Party. In 1956 SFIO leader Guy Mollet led a government which collapsed largely because of a disastrous foreign policy. The office of the president in France was not empowered until 1958.

2 SFIO members had a record of being contradictory. After being a part of the "Popular Front against war and
After the party's formation in 1969 the PS proceeded to collect other splinter groups of the left. Jean-Pierre Chevènement's radical-leftist Centre d'Études de Recherches et d'Éducation Socialiste (CERES) and François Mitterrand's small party, the Convention des Institutions Républicaines (CIR), joined the PS in 1971 at the second PS biennial meeting, the Épinay Congress. By reincarnating their party, the Socialists had provoked the uncertainty that comes with political evolution. They used their next conference following the party's transformation to clarify their vision for the future. Hence, the Épinay meeting represented a significant turning point and completed a process of renewal for the PS. Party members voted Mitterrand into the position of first secretary and party leader during this meeting. The conference was historically significant to the party also because it was there that party leaders laid the foundation for the Common Program of 1972 and much of the party's future ambitions. As a party formed by multiple leaders of previously existing political groups the PS was affected by the clashing of strong and determined political personalities.

One such clash between party leaders occurred just before the PS victory in 1981. Michel Rocard, who had become the voice of the party's moderates, openly challenged the authority of Mitterrand. Rocard and his party, the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU) joined the PS in 1974 after Mitterrand lost the presidential election to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. In a publicized statement Rocard, who hoped to become the PS presidential candidate in 1981, launched an

facism" beginning in 1935, a majority of SFIO members in the Chamber of Deputies voted for the instatement of Marshal Philippe Pétain in 1940. Under the leadership of Guy Mollet from 1946 to 1969, the SFIO again seemed increasingly at odds with itself. Despite its anti-clerical position, the socialists' coalition partner in most post-war governments was the Catholic Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP). From 1945 to 1956 the percentage of votes won by the SFIO decreased from 23.4% to 15.2%. 1969 has been credited with being "the nadir of Left" because at least four socialist and communist candidates ran for president. SFIO candidate Gaston Deferre received only 5.01% of the vote.

3 In 1969 the SFIO and two smaller groups led by socialists Jean Poperen and Alain Savary formed the PS.
5 Mitterrand made a deal with the CERES and party members Gaston Deferre and Pierre Mauroy in order to become the party's first secretary.
'agonizing reappraisal' of Socialist policy and strategy as part of an attempt to rescue the party from major errors in economic policy and to set it on the path to victory in the 1981 presidential election. Rocard said, "There is a profound archaism in the way in which we have approached these [economic] problems and notably that of nationalizations." Libertarian and more market-oriented, Rocard did not have the same enthusiasm for nationalizing France's economy as Mitterrand and his followers. The tight-knit group of Mitterrand's supporters, which included younger members like Laurent Fabius and Lionel Jospin, reacted by signing a statement which said, roughly, that they would never adhere to Rocard and would always remain loyal to Mitterrand. Mitterrand still had the majority of party support and easily became the presidential nominee in 1981, but the shadow of confused ideology followed the PS into office as party members grappled over whether following more traditional socialist policy guidelines or pursuing a reformed set of socialist ideas would serve them better.

The Rocard-Mitterrand clash of 1978 illustrated three important points about the nature of the PS. First, factionalism, shifting alliances and differing currents within the party continued to be key forces that moved the PS through the 1980s. Mitterrand always held the party's majority, but members of that majority would come and go based on the circumstances of the time. In this case, the party members' reaction to Rocard's questioning of Mitterrand's plans for a Left government drove the party's number-two man, Pierre Mauroy, away from the stability of the PS majority's alliance and toward Rocard's faction. In response to this move by Mauroy, Mitterrand made a new alliance with the CERES to maintain the majority at the party's 1979

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7 Ibid.
9 Mauroy was not informed of the PS members' intention to make a statement against Rocard. "He was both furious
Suspicions, secretive negotiations and the opportunistic behavior of party members continued to be characteristics of the PS.\footnote{The CERES was ejected from the majority in 1975 mainly because it was posing too much of a challenge to Mitterrand.}

Second, a majority of PS members were completely dedicated to following Mitterrand. During the Rocard-Mitterrand clash, as would be the case in the future, the opponent to the party leader found it hard to gain momentum because of the party majority's fervent defense of its position. Mitterrand owed his loyal following in part to the fact that party members like Fabius and Jospin genuinely admired and believed in his abilities. However, being close to Mitterrand was also a wise political investment. An observant PS member could see in 1978 that even though Rocard was more popular in opinion polls, Mitterrand was by far more popular amongst party members. It was obvious he would win the party's nomination for president in 1980 if he wanted to run. Nothing could guarantee political success more than being in Mitterrand's inner circle. For example, Jospin gained leadership of the party after Mitterrand became president and Fabius became his second prime minister in 1984. Mitterrand continued to exercise total control of the party through 1986.

Finally, the issue of altering traditional PS ideals was already a factor in party dynamics before "modernization" became an established government policy in 1984.\footnote{"Modernization" was a rather vague concept. Overall it meant embarking on a new ideological course and repudiating the archaic SFIO holdovers in the party. Thomas R. Christofferson, \textit{The French Socialists in Power, 1981-1986: From Autogestion to Cohabitation} (Cranbury: Associated U Presses, Inc., 1991), 190. Modernizing implied reformulating ideology by factoring in developments which had occurred since the early twentieth century. With modernization the Socialists could create more suitable policies for the France of the 1980s.} Rocard began the "archaism versus modernization" debate, which fueled the course of action taken by the PS from

at the slight to his authority and suspicious of a total takeover by Mitterrand henchmen." Ibid.
\footnote{Opportunistic behavior had also been a trait associated with the SFIO, especially during Mollet's time as party leader. Mollet's endorsement of General Charles de Gaulle from 1958 to 1962 upset many SFIO members and repulsed young socialists, who increasingly saw the SFIO as "a party of opportunist bureaucrats." Julius Friend, \textit{Seven Years in France: François Mitterrand and the Unintended Revolution, 1981-1988} (Boulder: Westview, 1989), 11.}
1978 to 1981. Rocard's argument provided one view of the state of the PS before it actually encountered the task of governing a country. When Rocard and Edmond Maire entered the PS in 1974 with their followers, a *deuxième gauche* emerged to counter the "archaism" of Mitterrand's majority. By 1979, 'two cultures' thrived in the PS, "the 'modern' culture that emphasized decentralization of the state, market forces, and anticommunism, and the 'archaic' one that stressed centralization of power, nationalization of the key economic sectors, and the *union de la gauche*." The battle of ideas between Rocard and Mitterrand (and their respective followers in the party) was important because these issues enveloped the party in 1982 and caused Mitterrand to initiate major changes in PS government policy, changes more in line with Rocard's ideas for France.

In addition to the leadership of major party members like Rocard and Mitterrand, several published works also influenced the party's development from 1972 to 1981. The Common Program of 1972, *Projet Socialiste*, and *110 Propositions pour la France* were three important socialist plans because each described the precise ideas and objectives of the PS on the eve of the party's 1981 victory. At the genesis of each were misguided motivations that helped contribute to the perceived failure of the government. These three plans also revealed the inadequacies of Socialist policies. The party's flawed logic and guidance of policy development during the decade prior to 1981 contributed to the first PS government's failure to successfully implement the Socialist initiatives that were explained in the three plans.

The first published work was the Common Program of 1972. Party members from the most leftist wing of the PS, the CERES, and former party leader Alain Savary conceived the idea for the program at the party's Épinay Congress in 1971. Members of the PS and the French

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13Bauman-Reynolds, 165.
14Christofferson, 47.
Communist Party, the PCF, formed groups to guide the drafting of the document and finished it in June 1972. The signing of the Common Program officially established the Union of the Left in 1973; indeed, the primary purpose of the Common Program was to re-unite the French Left. The leaders of the French Left wanted the program because of the need for electoral cooperation between the communists and socialists in order to put a Left-wing government in power.

The Common Program was supposed to be a statement of what a Union of the Left coalition would do in government. The final result was the outcome of negotiations between French socialists and communists over political institutions, economics, social services and international affairs. The program suggested how to improve society by extending the public sector, granting more power to labor unions and providing better social services to working people. The program's final form reflected a number of compromises. One was the recognition of the European Economic Community and the Treaty of Rome, a socialist position, couched in PCF demands to retain the freedom of action for a French Left government in the event one was elected. A long list of nationalizations that would occur if the Left were elected was also included at the insistence of the PCF. The proposal to nationalize a significant portion of French industry and business made PS members like Mauroy very nervous because of the likelihood of a negative reception by the public. The tone of the program as a whole was radical, partially because party radical Chevènement was assigned the task of guiding its creation. The program was unsettling to many PS members, especially Mitterrand's Épinay majority.

Devising the Common Program was a controversial matter in the PS. Mitterrand

15"It (The Common Program) was of prime symbolic importance, not only confirming the Socialist Party's Épinay strategy, but also capping the myth of Left unity..." Bell and Criddle, 74.
17Bell and Criddle, 73.
18Ibid. The probability that nationalization, as an action, would gain a stigma increased significantly since it was proposed by left-wing political groups. A rational fear existed within the PS that the public would associate nationalization with collectivization because the PCF was still considered a radical party. To a certain extent the
understood that the program was necessary in order for the PS to gain enough electoral support to put him in office. The future president alluded to the importance of the Common Program and the alliance of the Left in a speech he made at the National Convention in 1978. He said, "It was necessary to choose: either to construct a great party in which we united our forces, ideas and abilities together, or to maintain numerous small fractions...impotent in the course of History." The PS alone only appealed to the moderate Left, which did not include the powerful constituency of industrial workers. Mitterrand did not hide the fact that his main interest in allying with the PCF was to make his party more appealing to a majority of the Left's electorate. The Socialists used the PCF to prop themselves up. Mitterrand and his followers "wanted to maintain or increase their new electoral superiority and then pick and choose in the 1972 Common Program if the Left formed a government." The motivation behind this program was to increase the socialists' electibility, not to develop a feasible plan for a government, or a plan that would actually be used.

PS party members made the mistake of accomplishing just one of what should have been many objectives. They gained the larger electorate, but the socialists never updated the Common Program after 1972. The program quickly became outdated in 1974 when a worldwide economic recession set in. Even so, the PS leadership still used the plan as the foundation for later plans prior to 1981. Leaving the Common Program unrevised also created another disadvantage for the PS. A vaguely-worded economic plan that called for nationalizations remained embedded in a framework of anti-capitalist language. This frightened and discouraged Socialists were still seen as radicals, too.

22 The PCF had requested a revision after the economic downturn of 1974.
small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. The support of small and medium-sized businesses was precisely what the Left needed in order for the Common Program's economic plan to work. The Socialists just kept focusing on winning elections throughout the 1970s instead of developing a set of policies that would allow them to efficiently govern France.

The second significant work from the PS was Projet Socialiste. PS members produced Projet Socialiste in 1980 as a response to the new fracture in the party. This new plan for France was intended to re-define the Left's priorities after the Mitterrand-Rocard face-off. After Rocard challenged Mitterrand in 1978 Rocard lost his seat on the PS secretariat. Mauroy also lost his seat on the secretariat and his position as the party's number two man to Lionel Jospin. Chevènement and the CERES were admitted again into the PS majority. Projet Socialiste reflected the new balance of power in the PS and the ideas of the new secretariat dominated by Mitterrand's supporters after 1979. Mitterrand's majority wanted this project to rid the party of internal challenges. Projet Socialiste was specifically designed to appeal to the majority of the party's rank and file members and be unusable by the moderate Rocard as a presidential platform. It contained many radical CERES-inspired components that the party leadership knew Rocard did not agree with and would not endorse as a candidate. In historian Julius Friend's opinion, "The result was a pompous, dogmatic, and thoroughly unrealistic manifesto." Projet Socialiste was built on previous policy documents, including the Common Program from 1972. It was also based on responses given to a questionnaire issued to party activists. The text explained the PS plan for the 1980s in the event it was chosen to govern France. The project, which eighty-five percent of party members in attendance at the Alfortville

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23 Friend, Long Presidency, 18.
24 In order for PS economic plans to succeed, the capital from non-nationalized businesses had to stay in the French economy.
25 Bell and Criddle, 107.
Conference in 1980 approved, described how socialists would change the economic and cultural conditions in France. *Projet Socialiste* said, essentially, that the capitalist system had failed France and caused the exploitation of millions of French workers. The solution, of course, was the socialist plan of nationalizations, increased humanism and *autogestion*. Project Socialiste clearly stated the party's key intention: to change French society from a capitalist to a socialist one.  

The PS used *Projet Socialiste* to make an impression on two groups of people. As a party aware of its need to maintain the communist vote, PS members made themselves attractive to the communists. At the same time, the PS had to shake off the stereotype of being left-wing extremists akin to Stalin. Socialist party members devoted a portion of their project to defending the PS against opposition attacks on party plans and ideology. For their defense and counterattack against their rivals PS members said they had the triple advantage of "du travail, de la bonne foi, de la rigueur." The socialists denied taking orders from the Soviet Union and adhering to Stalinist-style collectivism. The authors of *Projet Socialiste* also explained the inherent relationship between liberty and socialism: "Si nous voulions en peu de mots exprimer l'essentiel, nous écririons que nous avons la certitude profonde, définitive, qu'il n'est de socialisme que celui de la liberté, qu'il n'est de liberté que celle du socialisme -- et qu'aucune puissance au monde n'étouffera cette évidence." Expressions like this one were included to

26Ibid.

The socialists believed their proposals would eliminate what they saw as the exploitation of workers by multinational capitalists, thus creating a more humanistic society. *Autogestion* is a term with varying definitions; roughly it translates to self-management by workers.


29Ibid, 11. "Du travail", according to the PS, referred to "a year and a half of reflection, study and debates at all levels of the party"; "de la bonne foi" refers to the Socialists' good intentions in printing their theses; "de la rigueur" refers to party discipline and the effort to answer the criticisms of party adversaries.

31Ibid, 10-11.
appeal to those who felt oppressed in a capitalist French society.

_Projet Socialiste_ truly represented what the majority of the PS felt about the condition of France and how the socialists wanted to change increasingly dire circumstances. However, the development of _Projet Socialiste_ was motivated significantly by the clash between Mitterrand and Rocard in the "modernization vs. archaism" debate. The first priority for the leadership of the PS, as it was with the Common Program, was not to make a plan for governing France. From spring 1978 to 1980 the PS was caught up in an internal power struggle that left little time for more important affairs.³³ The Mitterrandists' determination to quiet the Rocardian challenge prevented party members from seeing that their ideas could not be applied successfully to running the government. While writing this project party members did not consider how proposed socialist strategies might really pan out once implemented. For example, no facts or figures about how much nationalizations would cost the government and the country were included, nor was a thoroughly researched assessment of the condition of major French industries. The economic crisis had worsened and unemployment had risen but the PS shut its collective mind against any rethinking of its economic program, much of which had been questionable in 1972 and was eight more years out of date by 1980.³⁴ When the time came for the PS government to make good on promises the party had made, members paid dearly for their failure to understand the state of France's economy and society.

Mitterrand and his followers wanted _Projet Socialiste_ for aesthetic and electoral purposes, not for the practical purpose of governing. Mitterrand delegated the task of writing _Projet Socialiste_ to Chevènement, just as he had with the Common Program. Mitterrand wanted it to appear as though his majority and he would be sticking to the socialism envisioned by the

³⁴Ibid.
majority of party members. The idea that the party would transform itself into a more centrist entity was one the party majority wanted quashed completely. Again, one advantage of the Projet Socialiste was that it appealed to the communist electorate. Although Projet Socialiste gave the impression that the PS had moved further to the Left, it was an insincere shift because Mitterrand's position had been forced upon him by Rocard. As a piece written partially as a response to a provocation, this plan was filled with passionate talk about the virtues of what Rocard had called 'archaic' socialism. The popularity of Projet Socialiste within the party rallied more support for Mitterrand and had a unifying effect. However, the party's leadership failed to clarify the status of the Projet Socialiste 'wish list'. Ambiguity, again, was a flaw in socialist plans. Mitterrand ignored Projet Socialiste after it served its initial purpose, but the energy put into making the PS appear to be the bastion of the Left's ideology diverted attention away from the need to make informed policy and put the party at a disadvantage.

The final significant publication for the PS was Mitterrand's 110 Propositions pour la France. This piece was the least rhetorical and most practical. The propositions served as Mitterrand's presidential platform during the 1981 elections. Even though this set of socialist goals was not couched in the radical language of The Common Program and Projet Socialiste, it was still one of the most radical documents to come from a serious contender for power in the recent annals of Western politics. Propositions did not contain the revolutionary phrases of earlier PS manifestos, such as "transition to socialism" or "a rupture with capitalism." Mitterrand listed his objectives with a subtle tone. He proposed using "sufficient willpower" to carry out the Left's radical program and overcome the obstacles to reform represented by the economic

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35 Bell and Criddle, 107.
constraints of the existing capitalist system.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{110 Propositions} repeated many of the same ideas found in the Common Program and contained the same list of industries to be nationalized. It was more practical than the other two socialist publications because Mitterrand simply put forward a number of reforms he felt were necessary for France's well-being. Some of the goals were to reflate France's economy by increasing popular consumption and to use the state as an instrument of industrial policy and a dispenser of social justice through welfare reform.\textsuperscript{39} Under the four organizational headings of 'peace', 'employment', 'liberty', and 'France', Mitterrand began with a demand for the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and worked his way towards expressing a desire to secularize the private religious schools receiving state subsidies.\textsuperscript{40} The future president made it obvious that he endorsed "ultra-interventionism."\textsuperscript{41}

The PS and Mitterrand utilized \textit{110 Propositions} more than the Common Program or \textit{Le projet}. Ultimately the Common Program would not be used as the plan for the PS government in 1981. The socialists had possibly never intended to use the program, but it was also a contradictory document: too timid to lay the foundation of another system, yet too ambitious to fit into the existing framework of French society or to be accepted by the French people.\textsuperscript{42} The neutralist-sounding foreign policy, the ambiguity, lack of economic sense, and general incoherence of the Program elicited criticisms and affected the party's image negatively.\textsuperscript{43} When the first PS government took office, Mitterrand insisted that his propositions be at the core of government actions. While Mitterrand's platform differed in tone from the program and project,

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\textsuperscript{39}Ibid, 168.
\textsuperscript{40}Bell, 80.
\textsuperscript{41}Cole, 182.
\textsuperscript{42}Singer, 64.
\textsuperscript{43}Bell and Criddle, 74.
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it seemed "a mildly watered-down version of earlier programs." 110 Propositions proved the PS did not significantly modify its plans between 1972 and 1981, even though the economic situation around the world and in France worsened. Mitterrand's insistence that 110 Propositions be used as the basis for the first PS government in 1981 reflected a lack of preparedness and good sense.

These were three sets of policy proposals the PS produced before coming to power in 1981. The Socialists faced the challenge of trying to represent the political Left in France and appeal to voters in the center. The PS adopted policies for the purposes of creating stronger party unity and increasing its number of supporters in the electorate instead of taking positions that addressed the current conditions of the country. As a result, when the Socialists took control of the government they had a number of objectives that were either ill-suited to solve the nation's problems or not compatible with the reality of the situation. The PS could have chosen an immediate abandonment of its plans upon being elected to govern France:

"Given the potential mismatch between program and situation it was at least a theoretical possibility that the French Left in power would disregard preelectoral rhetoric and programmatic claims... The nature of the French Left and the charge of political electricity which the first Left government in decades brought with it made this unlikely, however."

Indeed, François Mitterrand and the PS ministers entered office and implemented the proposals that were constructed upon a mildly reformed plan from 1972. The PS government did succeed in implementing most of Mitterrand's proposals. The Socialists had to handle three situations, though, that convinced the government to reverse its policy objectives. The ongoing

44Ross, 8.
45In addition to the three discussed, other manifestos were Changer la vie, adopted by the PS in March of 1972 and '15 Theses on Autogestion', adopted by the PS in June of 1975.
economic crisis persuaded the government to do exactly the opposite of what its fiscal and industrial policies had been in 1981. Between 1983 and 1984, the Left's belief in the total secularization of public services met a fatal challenge in public opinion after Mitterrand attempted to implement his plan to incorporate Catholic education into the secular mainstream. In 1985 the PS realized their concurrent efforts to grant greater regional autonomy in France's overseas territories and protect France's right to test nuclear weapons could not be continued together. The Greenpeace scandal, also known as the "Rainbow Warrior Affair", then unfolded and sparked a controversy. These crises had the potential to devastate the PS beyond repair. However, in each case the Socialists attained a measure of success despite having to sacrifice their initial guiding principles.47

An Economic Crisis

France's economic problems began before the Socialists arrived in power. An international recession partially rooted in the 1973 increase of oil prices adversely affected the growth of France's economy. Unstable exchange rates, rising interest rates and a slowdown in export demand contributed to the nation's financial problems. French industries of production experienced declines in profit and investment. By 1980, the French GDP had stagnated. In a flight of capital five billion dollars left France between February and May of 1981.48 When the

46Ross, 8.
47This period between 1981 and 1986 was representative of at least the PS leadership. "The Socialist party organization was stripped of many of its experienced leaders, as its chiefs became ministers and took their aides with them." Except for seven people, the entire government and an overwhelming number of its staff came from the Socialist party, giving it 'enormous' power and responsibility. Friend, Long Presidency, 27.
48Singer, 104. The Socialists continued to face this problem after their election. The head of one of France's leading private banking companies, Paribas, transferred much of the bank's investment capital to Swiss banks to protest the
Socialists took office, the Paris Stock Exchange was paralyzed. The French, who had grown accustomed to increasing standards of living, became pessimistic about the country's economic outlook. Inflation and unemployment were serious concerns for French people. The PS was elected mostly because of the people's frustration with the conservatives and their inability to relieve economic difficulties. The Socialists had sounded appealing during the elections, promising better conditions for workers, more jobs and an increase in social welfare measures.

The Socialists faced difficulties as the new government endeavored to solve the economic crisis. From the beginning of its term the government did not have a specific economic policy to follow. The Socialists had, rather, a series of ideas that theoretically sounded good and won support for the party. The Socialist documents produced during the 1970s presented ideas dominated by ideology and a preference to take political actions regardless of economic factors, which ultimately offered little guidance when practically applied.\(^49\) When Mitterrand and his ministers began making decisions regarding the economic crisis in 1981, their intended solution was to "reflate" the economy out of its recession. This route allowed the PS to fulfill pledges made during the election campaign by offering direct aid to the middle and working classes at the expense of the big businesses. Mitterrand also made the crucial and politically motivated decision to not devalue the franc. The PS also went ahead with the planned nationalizations but without having thought about how to run the industries or what nationalization would contribute to the economy.\(^50\) The Socialist government made a series of mistakes as the president and his ministers formulated economic and industrial policies during 1981 and 1982. These Socialist leaders eventually succeeded, though, at reversing their initial economic programs and

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\(^{49}\) Christofferson, 67.

\(^{50}\) Bell, 97. Nationalization was not perceived as 'radical' in France. The country had a mixed or Keynesian economy, and General de Gaulle nationalized industries after World War II. Nationalizing is not part of the 'ancestral heritage'
responding pragmatically to existing or developing financial and industrial problems.\textsuperscript{51}

The Socialists presiding in the government did not proceed with drastic measures as the party's rank-and-file members expected. Militant Leftists mistakenly believed their success meant the French had given Mitterrand a mandate for revolutionary changes. During the summer of 1981 PS members and other radicals from the Left revived the cry for a 'rupture with capitalism' and workers' democratization without considering what these changes would entail.\textsuperscript{52}

At the Socialists' Valence congress, on October 23, 1981 party leaders went so far as to engage in some rather alarming public discourse, with undertones of a pending socialist 'revolution', for the sake of the party's radicals, earning the meeting's nickname "the Congress of Ayatollahs."\textsuperscript{53}

The actual mood of the government, however, was better represented by party leaders urging caution to the delegates. Even the author of the radically worded programs that helped fuel the socialist fervor, Minister of Research and Industry Chevènement, counseled his CERES followers to be patient and choose their demands carefully.\textsuperscript{54} Ultimately, the Socialist government did not 'fail' at implementing the 'rupture with capitalism' because that was not what the government had endeavored to do in the first place.

The macroeconomic policy of the Socialists during France's economic crisis has been of the French Left nor is the act of nationalizing intrinsically leftist, unless collectivization in implied.\textsuperscript{51}Christofferson, 73.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid, 63. Leftists expecting a genuine break with capitalism were encouraged by PS and PCF claims made during the election. Both parties vilified capitalists by informing voters that the economic crisis had been 'manufactured' by the government and the bosses.\textsuperscript{53}Doug Ireland, "La Vie en Rose," The Nation, November 7, 1981, 461. Academic Search Premier. http://search.ebscohost.com/. Gaston Deferre and the party's number three man, Paul Quilès, apparently caught up in the combative mood of other party members, made some rather inflammatory comments the opposition. Quilès, while referring to the removal of bureaucrats and company directors who wanted to 'sabotage' the will of the French people, said "It is not enough to say...that heads must roll. We must also say whose heads, and do it quickly," thus evoking memories the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{54}Ibid. Chevènement said, "militants do not have the right to be malcontents." Chevènement knew, at least, the repercussions of 'overthrowing' capitalist executives in the private sector and wished to avoid wreaking further havoc in the economy. Pierre Mauroy also reminded delegates that the government represented the interests of those who were not socialists, too, and in a rather revealing move, Mitterrand was not in attendance.
described as a series of three stages.\textsuperscript{55} Stage one of the Socialists' economic policy was a 'redistributive reflation'.\textsuperscript{56} From 1981 to 1982, Mitterrand and the Socialist government also enacted a series of reflationary measures. The measures were designed to increase public employment and the spending power of less affluent households.\textsuperscript{57} They included a raise in the minimum wage, old age pensions, housing subsidies, and family allowances, supplying aid to the building industry for public works and hiring additional teachers and administrators. At the same time, the government moved ahead with number twenty-one of Mitterrand's 110 proposals. During the first session of the new Assembly in July, 1981, Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy made nationalizations the core focus of the general policy declaration.\textsuperscript{58} After some internal party and governmental debate over full or partial government takeover, Mitterrand approved the full nationalization of companies in conglomerates and industrial groups. After the nationalization law passed in 1982, eleven industrial conglomerates, two finance companies, thirty-six banks, and various other firms became the property of the government.

The government's macroeconomic policy had many flaws. Stage one of the Socialists' economic policy proved to be a failure because of international economic factors, the negative effects of the reflation and the dismal state of French industry. The international recession continued, which meant no increased demand for French exports. Mitterrand's early refusal to devalue the franc made French exports even less competitive on the international market because of their high costs. The rising value of the dollar and American interest rates brought an increase in the price of energy for France. The government had planned to pay for the enacted social

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\textsuperscript{55}Peter Hall, "The Evolution of Economic Policy Under Mitterrand," in The Mitterrand Experiment, 54-72. Christofferson has described the Socialists' economic policies in three phases; phase 1 lasted from May to December of 1981.

\textsuperscript{56}Hall, 54.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid, 55.

\textsuperscript{58}Friend, Long Presidency, 28. Proposition 21 read: "The public sector will be enlarged by the nationalization of the nine industrial groups...and of the steel industry and the armaments and space activities financed by public funds."
measures by reaping the profits of the predicted rapid economic growth which was supposed to arrive by 1982.\textsuperscript{59} When that expected growth failed to materialize, the Socialists were left holding the bill for increased consumer spending in France and no way to pay for it. France's involvement in the European Monetary System also placed constraints on the effectiveness of reflation. On October 4, 1981, the Socialists finally fell in line with the international trend and devalued the franc after losing a significant portion of their foreign reserves. The franc had to be devalued and the government had to accept some deflationary measures just to maintain the continued support of foreign creditors for the currency.\textsuperscript{60}

Reflation actually created additional problems for the PS as it helped plunge the country into debt. The Socialists made the mistake of trying to stimulate the economy at a time when French industry was not equipped to meet an increased demand from consumers. France's consumer spending indeed went up, but it increased import demand while the demand for French exports did not rise. The Socialist policy increased the French trade deficit by 27 billion francs, contributing to the overall deterioration of France's trade balance and reducing the country's rate of growth by 1 per cent of GDP.\textsuperscript{61} The government budget went from a surplus of 2.9 billion francs in 1980 to a deficit of 61.2 billion in 1981.\textsuperscript{62} Reflation also denied the French economy any increased investment. Some measures had been paid for by increased taxes on employers, which redistributed income away from corporations already in debt and losing profitability.\textsuperscript{63} The policy dismayed French businesspeople, whose investments were crucial to economic

\textsuperscript{59}Economic prognostications from the Organization for European Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicted an average growth of 2\% in GNP and a 6.25\% rise in demand for French exports. Ibid, 31.

\textsuperscript{60}In October the franc was devalued by 8.5\% - a 3\% devaluation of the franc and a 5.5 revaluation of the deutsche mark. West Germany requested a reduction of 15 billion francs in France's budget for 1982. Ibid, 33.

\textsuperscript{61}Rising interest rates and changes in exchange rates within the U.S. accounted for an additional trade deficit of 57.4 billion francs. Hall, 56.

\textsuperscript{62}Christofferson, 100.

\textsuperscript{63}Business spent more on salaries and invested less, as the cost of workers rose from 69.8\% of a firm's added value.
recovery. Investors continued to move large amounts of capital out of the country due to the inevitable devaluation of the franc and skepticism sparked by the government's anti-capitalist remarks.

The beginning of the second stage of the Socialists' economic policy, called *rigueur*, was also unsuccessful. While a step in the right direction, the devaluation of October 1981 could not be successful unless the appropriate deflationary controls were implemented. Mauroy's government continued with a program of reforms and in September of 1981 the Budget Minister, Laurent Fabius, presented an expansionary budget for 1982 against the advice of Finance Minister Jacques Delors. In April of 1982 inflation jumped 1.2% and wages increased by 4.8% for the first quarter. The Socialists partially conceded to Delors' demands and reluctantly accepted economic rigor as a part of their policy. Finally, in June of 1982 Mitterrand approved another devaluation and the government established deflationary measures by implementing a four-month wage and price freeze and limiting the public sector deficit to just 3% of France's GDP. Public spending had to be cut by twenty billion francs. Since the government had promised the austerity measures would be temporary, thus implying France would progress in a socialist direction, the confidence of business leaders was further abated and much needed capital stayed out of the country's economy. Despite the new direction of economic policy, speculation against the franc did not slow down and inflation stayed close to double digits. *Rigueur* had not gone far enough.

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64 Mauroy insisted that the Socialists proceed with the agenda of reforms. The Prime Minister assured the party that 'rigor' would not be applied to the reform program. "La rigueur dans la solidarité et la vigilance dans la relance économique," was how Delors defined the policy he suggested. The finance minister wanted the Socialists to pursue a program which involved decreased spending on social welfare programs. Delors argued the government needed to put further reforms on hold in order to concentrate on stimulating investment in France's economy. Ibid, 73.

65 Ibid, 100.

66 The primary objective of deflationary measures was to improve the competitive position of French business. Hall, 57. A third measure was a 1% increase in value-added taxes. Friend, *Long Presidency*, 36.
The government's policy for nationalized industries also needed alterations. The purpose of nationalizing had been to seize the "commanding heights of the economy." The Socialists had not counted on buying liabilities. Many industries had been merely supported by the state instead of rebuilt, allowing their competitiveness to deteriorate for ten years. In 1981 and 1982, the government had instructed the directors of nationalized industries to maintain employment levels without understanding how this request would contribute to existing profit losses. The final audit on newly nationalized industries released in May of 1982 revealed they had suffered enormous losses. The faltering industries could not be bailed out easily. New technology required massive funding that the government was not able to provide since it had agreed to keep deficit spending at 3%.

By the end of 1982 the Socialists agreed that the government needed a drastic shift in the way it approached economic problems. PS party members, both in and outside of the government, could not agree on how economic policy should change. One option was continued austerity, which did not sit well with the Socialists who wanted the government to focus on helping the Left's constituency immediately and directly. The other option came to be known as the "alternative policy." Proponents of the "alternative policy" began courting Mitterrand in an effort to convince him it was the better choice. In theory, the "alternative policy" would have allowed the government to continue with original socialist policies by freeing France's economy from the restraints of the country's capitalist partners. However, the "alternative policy" was

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67Friend, ibid, 40.
68Bell, 98 and Hall, 54.
69Christofferson, 101.
70Mauroy referred to the advocates of the "alternative" policy, who were ministers and personal advisers, as the "night visitors." They included Jean Ribaud, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, Pierre Bérégovoy, Chevènement, and Fabius. Mauroy did not support the "alternative policy."
71Friend, Long Presidency, 42. The alternative policy consisted of France's withdrawal from the European Monetary System (EMS), the implementation of import restrictions and continued concentration on creating jobs.
risky and its supporters could not guarantee it would work. Furthermore, Delors and most of the government's economists were able to prove some of the disastrous outcomes that were likely to occur if the "alternative policy" was followed. Logic triumphed over sentiments to stick to the original PS economic policies. Mitterrand decided against the "alternative policy" because it had the potential to be dangerous. The president made a rational decision by choosing continued austerity.

Success finally came when the government made earnest changes in its plan to resolve France's economic problems. Gradually the Socialists accepted that the way they wanted to fix economic problems was not going to work due to the influence of international conditions and the inherent dependence on capitalism in a mixed economy. Necessary devaluations and deflationary measures had forced cuts in social spending. The party's initial program had cost too much and depended on industries that needed massive amounts of investment before they could be profitable again or provide more jobs. Businesses, the government realized, needed financial breaks to increase and attract investment. Consumer spending had to be curbed in order to reduce the trade deficit. The government found itself unable to pursue the original economic policy that emphasized immediate aid to the lower classes and battling unemployment. Mitterrand and his ministers simply could not justify continuing the effort to apply 'socialism' to France's economy after they had learned the possible risks of doing so. The Socialists chose to impose long term austerity on their own constituency and encourage capitalist solutions, which ultimately proved successful.

72"Their ideas were so vague that they had no details to back them up," said Mauroy aide Henri Guillaumé. Ibid, 43. Withdrawal from the EMS would have intensified pressure against the franc and required a greater austerity; autarchy behind tariff barriers would have provoked international retaliation against French exports. Hall, 57.
73Delors was able to prove that the French monetary reserves would not survive the speculation that would occur if the "alternative policy" were followed; that the foreign debt would increase by 70 billion francs; that no other countries would lend to France; and that interest rates would have to be hiked up to 20% or higher, which would deter investment. Friend, *Long Presidency*, 43.
The Socialist ministers made their next significant economic move in March of 1983 when the government allowed the extension of the austerity policy. This point of the economic crisis marked the earnest re-routing of Mauroy and Mitterand's economic solutions. Following this policy meant relieving unemployment would no longer be the first priority as well as accepting low or no economic growth. On March 21 the government devalued the franc again and intensified deflationary measures in order to reduce the rate of domestic inflation and the trade deficit by curbing consumer spending. The Socialists made consumers and workers pay for austerity with tax increases equaling forty billion francs so private business could regain a satisfactory rate of profit. Business also received tax breaks and an 8% limit was imposed on wage and price increases for 1984. Industrial policy was also reconstructed in 1983 because of increased rigueur. In order to improve the competitiveness of French industry and encourage growth, the Socialists accepted layoffs in nationalized and private industries as unfortunate, but necessary for the profitability of designated companies.

The final phase of the Socialists' programs during the economic crisis began when Laurent Fabius replaced Mauroy as prime minister in July of 1984. The theme of Fabius' new government was the broad term 'modernization.' For the economy, this involved continued austerity, pro-business measures, the liberalization of industrial policy, and the third stage of the government's macroeconomic policy, a neo-liberal relance. Investment, reduction of the burden of social costs falling on industry, a move toward freeing industrial prices, and lower

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74During the first year of the new government, unemployment rose by 14.9%. Friend, *Long Presidency*, 38.
75Public spending was cut by 24 billion francs in 1983. Hall, 57.
76Out of 22 million taxpayers, 8 million had to make a 10% compulsory loan to the government figured as a surcharge on income tax; 15 million had to pay a 1% surtax on income. The taxes on alcohol and tobacco were raised, as were electricity and gas prices. Railroad tickets and telephone rates also went up earlier than scheduled. Hall, 57 and Friend, ibid, 44.
77This reflation, unlike the one attempted in 1981, was designed to raise the purchasing power of the French through reductions in taxation. Hall, 58.
taxes were the main points of the Fabius plan.\textsuperscript{78} Reductions in social security benefits were reaffirmed for 1984 and 1985. The 1985 budget cut public spending and redistributive programs. The tax burden decreased by forty billion francs, with corporations receiving a ten-billion-franc tax cut. To maintain the budget deficit at 3\% of the GDP 5,000 civil service jobs disappeared and subsidies to nationalized industries were reduced. Similarly, the 1986 budget limited government spending again in order to allow for a 3\% reduction in the basic rate of income tax and a 5\% reduction in corporate taxes.\textsuperscript{79} In industry the government allowed for nationalized corporations to operate with less ministerial supervision. Most importantly, the Socialists discovered a way to bring private capital into industry by selling up to 15\% of the stock of certain companies.

At the expense of putting less emphasis on solving unemployment or letting the needs of the poor take precedence, the government succeeded at taking the measures needed to stabilize France's economic condition. In 1986 the PS left the economy in relatively good shape.\textsuperscript{80} In 1984 inflation rates started falling as a result of the wage and salary freeze of 1982 and 1983. The Socialist measures broke a vicious cycle of inflation linking wage and cost increases, an issue the previous administration could not resolve.\textsuperscript{81} The government's effectiveness in imposing austerity measures also contributed to the improved state of the external account and increased growth and investment after years of stagnation. The Socialists were able to defeat longstanding economic problems by limiting a dangerous increase in imports and correcting

\textsuperscript{78}Reprinted in Friend, ibid, 64. The reformist approach of Mauroy's government was discarded. The new Socialist government now focused very on management. Fabius had in mind the idea of improving education to meet the needs of a modern society and the notion that the state must intervene to spur on research and development of high technology in a society that is incapable of advancing such projects because of the weakness of capitalism and the lack of an entrepreneurial spirit. In 1985, the minister of education received a 7\% increase in funding to 'modernize' education at a time when most other departments had their budgets cut. Christofferson 194, 197.

\textsuperscript{79}Hall, 58.

\textsuperscript{80}Hall, 61.

imbalances in the budget for social security. The measures taken to reduce costs for corporations led to increased investment beginning in 1984. The government's actions taken to increase the profitability of companies and allow private investment in nationalized industries renewed business confidence and revived the Parisian stock market. The Socialists emerged from their term with an enhanced reputation for fiscal responsibility.

The success of PS policies regarding nationalization and unemployment has been difficult to calculate. The two areas were linked because positive developments in nationalized industries after 1983 had adverse effects on the country's employment problem. The government could have poured funds into nourishing dying sectors in order to save jobs, which would have been a fruitless and expensive effort. Instead, the government decided to invest in modernization, which was in this case an update for France's industries that would make them more suited for the present circumstances. The Socialists proved themselves to be effective managers of nationalized enterprise by focusing on the development future technology. Productivity and employment declined but it was for the sake of restructuring. Most of the newly nationalized industries in the competitive sectors were successfully restructured. Corporation bosses managed to balance their books in two years and in 1985 only one firm remained in the red. However, the cost of modernizing was increased unemployment, plus plant closings and monetary investments. In the sectors of steel, coal, shipbuilding, and with the car manufacturer Renault, profits did not rise despite job losses. The Socialists did develop a

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82 The Paris Bourse "had never been so prosperous as under the Socialists in 1985, and Economics Minister Pierre Beregovoy basked in the approval of the financial community." Friend, Seven Years, 162-3.
83 Hall, 71.
84 Jacques Delors said it was impossible to determine whether nationalization was an economic success because so many variables clouded the picture: the crise mondiale, the vieillissement de l'économie française, and the problems of étatisation. Christofferson, 204.
85 Ibid, 201. Programs to restructure the electronics, machine-tools and textile sectors also showed positive results. Hall, 65.
86 Ibid, 64.
manpower policy to offset rising levels of unemployment.87 One particularly successful idea was the creation of Travaux d'utilite collective or TUCs. Under this program unemployed youths (ages sixteen to twenty-one) were hired to work on socially useful public-service jobs for eighty hours a month at a salary below the minimum wage but above the unemployment benefit level.88 TUCs helped stabilize French unemployment in 1985. Instead of the predicted three million only 2.4 million remained jobless.

The party elected because of its promises to solve unemployment failed to do so. The unemployment level increased almost every year the Socialists were in office, but French levels were close to European averages. France lost only 436,000 jobs from 1981 to 1984, compared with 1.3 million in Britain and 1.1 million in West Germany during the same period.89 Unemployment soared from 2,181,000 to 2,456,700 in 1984, but jobs lost in industry were sacrificed for the purpose of creating newer and better jobs in the future. The Socialists did fail to live up to the high expectations they raised during the campaigning of 1981, a situation party leaders admitted to creating due to their failure to understand the nature of France's economic problems. Even so, Socialist ministers made tough decisions based on facts and logic, which proved to be effective. The PS succeeded in adapting to the economic crisis as it unfolded.

The Church School Affair

Number ninety of Mitterrand's 110 proposals called for the creation of a great unified and

87 Schemes to deal with unemployment since 1981 included creation of public sector jobs, early retirement programs, the workweek reduction to 39 hours, youth training and negotiated industry or region-specific programs. Ibid, 65. The Socialists also devised a plan to limit the negative effects of modernization that involved the creation of special zones where special financial incentives would draw new investment and presumably create new jobs. Friend, Long Presidency, 67.
88 Christofferson, 198. Part-time public employment for youth took 140,000 off the unemployment rolls in 1984-85. Hall, 65.
secular education system. Secular schooling, a fundamental tenet of the Left, became a topic of controversy for the Mauroy government after Education Minister Alain Savary attempted to draw up legislation designed to resolve the conflict sparked by the state's financing of private schools and improve the overall quality of education provided for French schoolchildren. Religious teaching in private schools, ninety-three percent of which were run by the Catholic Church, was not the subject of this controversy. Still, the conflict the Socialists revived in 1981 was a familiar one for the French. The abandonment of Savary's proposed reforms represented the failure of another Socialist initiative. However, the PS government succeeded at proving itself considerate of public opinion and diffusing the situation. The government also managed to re-approach the subject and implement the same proposals it had deserted.

The co-existence of secular and parochial education in France had been an evolving subject since the time of the Revolution. Until 1905 the key debate had revolved around determining whether the state or the Church was responsible for educating the masses. In 1951, when the French Right reinstated state financing for Catholic schools with the Marie and Barange laws, the funding of private schools became the primary issue. Since the inter-war years clerics had argued that their schools' supporters could not afford to finance them and that the state should uphold both secular and private education by acting impartially towards each. In 1959 the Debré law replaced the indirect funding of 1951 with subsidies given directly to

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90 During the Revolution, the original opposition to Catholic education was based on the belief that church schools were an obstacle in building a modern nation. Sofia Oberti, "Should the State Finance Private Education? Alain Savary's Attempt to Solve the Private School Debate in France from 1981 to 1984" (MA diss., University of British Colombia, 1999) 7. After 1882, when French statesman Jules Ferry introduced the secular education system, the Catholic school system went into decline. In 1905 the Radicals of the Third Republic established the separation of church and state and expelled the Church from public education.

91 "Church and State in France," Time, April 16, 1951. Time Archives. http://www.time.com.proxy.bsu.edu/time/archive/. The first form of financial support provided by the state to Catholic schools was introduced during the Vichy regime but was rescinded after World War Two. Since the interwar period, the Church hierarchy claimed their system would collapse from "financial asphyxiation" and Catholics argued that national unity was not compromised by maintaining the two parallel educational systems.
private schools. More legislation benefiting private schools was passed in 1977. The Guermeur law gave more autonomy to church schools and allocated funds for building new schools and training teachers. Defenders of private schools supported the maintenance of subsidized private schools because the dual system offered families a choice in schooling and democratized education since either system was affordable for all social classes.\textsuperscript{92}

The gains made by private schools in the post-war era angered secularists. Since the 1950s advocates of lay schools had asked for all educational institutions receiving public funds to be a part of the public education system.\textsuperscript{93} In 1951 the SFIO, under the leadership of Guy Mollet, resigned from serving in the coalition governments of which they had been a part since the Liberation to protest the passage of the Marie and Barange laws.\textsuperscript{94} The Debré laws provoked Mollet to warn the conservative majority that when the Left's inevitable rise to power happened all schools and teachers seeking public funds would be considered "ipso facto, as having affirmed their calling to enter the public service, and thus it will be done."\textsuperscript{95} The PS maintained the SFIO's anti-clerical position by reaffirming Mollet's pledge in 1972. The Socialists and other anti-clericals disagreed with the state subsidizing private schools because the government was forced to divert funding away from public schools in order to comply with the Debré and Guermeur laws.\textsuperscript{96} According to secularists, the diverted amount of money was so great that it

\textsuperscript{92}Alain Léger, "Les détours par l'enseignement privé," in Jean-Pierre Terrail, \textit{La scolarisation de la France}. (Paris: La Dispute/Snédit, 1997), 72, reprinted in Oberti, 57. In general, those who supported private schools believed in a 'private service of the general interest' and were politically associated with the right or center-right. Ibid, 36. State subsidies made tuition for many private schools affordable for working-class families.

\textsuperscript{93}The slogan prior to 1959 had been "public funds for public schools alone" and secularists had not extended the invitation to be apart of the public school system to religious schools. Singer, 180

\textsuperscript{94}Bell and Criddle, 17. Anti-clericalism was a sentiment roughly associated with the left as the Socialists took up the role of being the defenders of the secular Republic. Egalitarians thought private schools were elitist and sectarian, therefore in direct conflict with the goals of the Left. Erik Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "Kulturkampf in France," \textit{National Review} April 6, 1984, 47. http://search.ebscohost.com/


\textsuperscript{96}Between 1977 and 1981, state funding for private schools increased by 2.5% while funding for public schools decreased by 1.5%.
harmed public education and infringed on the rights of the general public. The legal obligation
to fund the schools also bothered the Socialists and secularists in general. The lack of control
over private-school programs angered them as much as the diversion of funds.\(^{97}\)

As the PS approached this issue in 1981 both sides agreed some reform of the entire
educational system in France was needed, a fact confirmed by an increase in the number of
students who transferred out of public schools after the primary level.\(^{98}\) One of the reasons that
private schools found widespread public support was because the public-school system needed
some fundamental changes. In addition to questioning the quality of public education, parents
also worried about their children not receiving extra help from teachers. If students in the public
system did not have an established medical problem but still needed a different pedagogical
approach in order to learn, parents found no recourse in public schools and their children were
often left behind.\(^{99}\) Private schools offered an ancillary system of schooling that compensated
for the selective action of the highly competitive public sector and provided struggling students
with a greater chance at academic success.\(^{100}\) Secularists said the only way to eliminate the
academic and social inequalities of the system was to nationalize subsidized private schools,
while proponents of private schooling argued that the existence of their system helped provide
greater equality in education and that any changes could be implemented without integration.
However, the private school system was not a perfect solution for the problems of public schools

\(^{97}\) The PS government was legally bound to provide funding for private-school programs, even if it disagreed with
the substance of those programs.

\(^{98}\) Oberti, 67.

\(^{99}\) The undemocratic nature of the public system caused public schools to send a disproportionate number of students
from the working class to lesser apprenticeship or vocational schools. 35\% of working class students who passed the
baccalauréat came from private schools; 21\% came from public schools. Ibid, 58, 64.

\(^{100}\) Richard Teese, "Private Schools in France: Evolution of a System," Comparative Education Review 30, no. 2
(1986): 258. Private schools had the ability to adjust their programs to meet the needs of individual children and
their families, whereas the public schools were bound to the statutes regulating the highly centralized public system.
Students who had failed in public schools usually improved after they transferred to private schools because teachers
could provide additional help.
because private schools were not accessible to all students. Private schools were generally established in bourgeois districts and offered limited help in certain areas of study.\textsuperscript{101} The Socialist education minister had to find a way to ensure that all students had an equal chance of succeeding academically.

The educational reform crisis began with a campaign promise Mitterrand made during the first round of the presidential election to gain the support of a powerful PS constituency, the Fédération de l'Éducation Nationale (FEN).\textsuperscript{102} The FEN was a public-school teachers' union known for its influence in the Ministry of Education. This organization and the forty-eight percent of Socialist deputies in the National Assembly from the teaching profession felt that the creation of a unified and secular system of public education was of extreme importance.\textsuperscript{103} However, secularizing private schools was not a priority of the Mauroy government. The financial repercussions of funding both systems were not detrimental to the state, and the government realized pursuing secularization would simply rehash ideological and religious quarrels.\textsuperscript{104} Mitterrand had always intended for any changes to happen as the result of negotiations between private-school supporters and the government. The future president clarified his intentions in a letter addressed to the public on May 1, 1981.\textsuperscript{105} Accordingly, Mitterrand and Mauroy picked Alain Savary to be the Minister of Education. Savary was a man known for his ability to negotiate and did not have a strong predisposition regarding the church

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\textsuperscript{101}The nearest private school might have specialized in Math or Science instead of Social Studies, the subject a student needed help with. Oberti, 57.

\textsuperscript{102}Joseph P. Morray, Grand Disillusion: Mitterrand and the French Left (CT: Praeger, 1997), 130, quoted in Oberti, 42.

\textsuperscript{103}Oberti, 67.

\textsuperscript{104}The education budget increased in 1982 by 17.3%, compared to a general budget increase of 27.6% and an inflation rate of approximately 14%. John Ambler, "Equality and the Politics of Education," in The French Socialist Experiment (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1985), 125, cited in Oberti, 49.

\textsuperscript{105}He said, "je souhaite que la mise en place de ce grand service public de l'éducation - qui aura vocation d'accueillir tous les établissements et tous les personnels - soit le résultat d'une négociation et non d'une décision unilatérale. Je souhaite rassembler et non diviser. " The letter is reprinted in its entirety in Oberti, 104.
school issue.

By the summer of 1982 it was clear that the primary objective of Savary's mission had changed. The government had to abandon the idea of a "united and secular" service in part because it would have led to an intolerable power struggle. Another significant factor was the pronounced lack of public support, from the Left or the Right, for the absorption of private schools into the public system. Public opinion had been in favor of state financial support for private schools for a number of years. In Mitterrand's camp, only forty percent were opposed to the subsidies. In polls Savary commissioned in April 1982 public support for private schools was reaffirmed. Approximately eighty percent of parents with children in school, public or private, supported private schools and eighty-five percent of parents with children in public schools wanted to have the option of selecting autonomous private schooling if it was needed. The public valued the freedom to choose. The majority of the French did not see the Church as a threat to democracy and appreciated church schools for fulfilling a practical purpose. Most of the population wanted to see the public school system reformed.

The Socialist government officially stopped pursuing secularization and proceeded with educational reform with the hope of achieving tolerance and pluralism. Instead of trying to secularize private schools, Savary sought measures which would unify the two systems, but not make them exactly the same. Savary made the effort to truly understand the issue. He consulted

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106 Antoine Prost, "The Educational Maelstrom," in The Mitterrand Experiment, 230. Prost authored one of the reports Savary used to determine the direction of his policies.

107 In 1974, only 23% of the French opposed the subsidies; in 1978 only 33% of respondents to one poll wanted to integrate private schools into the public system. Figures taken respectively from Prost, 229 and Friend, Long Presidency, 55. Since 1978 polls showed that 2/3 of the French favored the subsidization of private schools. Alain Savary, En toute liberté (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 122, cited in Oberti, 66.


110 Oberti, 77.
forty-eight organizations, Catholic figures and secularists. By May 1982 Savary had determined what the most pressing issues were. He then attempted to address the complaints of public school figures first. The two main grievances revolved around funding and the private schools' exemption from following policies that public schools had to follow. In the fall of 1982 negotiations began with private school leaders. The first draft of the "Savary Project" appeared in Le Monde on December 21, 1982. Two proposals were particularly significant. One gave private-school teachers the option to become certified by the state, a process called la titularisation. The second created établissements d'intérêt public (EIP). These geographical regions would help establish a closer connection between the two school systems by bringing all schools in each EIP under the supervision of an administrative council that represented the state and local governments. To help maintain the autonomy of the private system, Savary said each school could determine its own mission, its caractère propre. A day after the project's release private school leaders rejected it anyway and said they wanted more of a guarantee that their schools would not be integrated into the public system.

While Savary drafted the second set of propositions, he also devised a plan of increased decentralization in order to promote initiative in individual schools and address the problem of educational inequality in the public and private systems. Savary was still trying to decrease the differences between public and private schools, this time by attempting to bring pedagogical techniques in both systems in line with one another. Savary based his pedagogical reforms on

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111Savary, 225, cited in Oberti, 69.
112Mitterrand recruited his sister, Genevieve Delachenal, to host secret meetings in her apartment with representatives of private school associations. Secular organizations like the Comité national d'action laïque (CNAL), the Free Masons and the Fédération des conseils de parents d'élèves des écoles publiques did not support any compromise and saw Savary as a traitor. Christofferson, 144.
113Under an EIP the Church would run the private schools with the administrative council and maintain ownership of the actual school building. Academic calendars would also be coordinated. Oberti, 79-80.
114The caractère propre could be spiritual, cultural or athletic. Ibid, 79.
115Ibid, 80.
reports that proposed decentralization as a way to train teachers better, revitalize the schools and provide students with a better system of tutoring.\textsuperscript{117} In the second draft of the "Savary Project," published on October 18, 1983, \textit{la titularisation} had become a requirement for teachers in subsidized schools and the role of the EIP was adjusted so it would assist in decentralizing administration. Both school systems would receive the same funds, private schools would be subjected to more of the same rules and, most important, it was made even clearer that private schools would not be absorbed into the state system.\textsuperscript{118} Private school representatives agreed that this draft was negotiable.

The remaining obstacle to the successful completion of a compromise involved the subject of \textit{la titularisation}. One problem was that not all teachers in private schools wanted to become state-certified, which required passing a state examination. A second problem was that once teachers became certified they qualified for civil servant status and private school teachers could work in either system. Directors of private schools feared they would lose their teachers to public schools, be replaced by public school teachers and then, inadvertently, the private system would fall under the control of the state.\textsuperscript{119} The Church authorities and the government finally reached a compromise in April 1984. Catholic educators agreed to accept the \textit{titularisation} of all teachers in a private school if fifty percent of those teachers voted for it. In exchange, the state had to recognize the \textit{caractère propre} of Catholic schools and guarantee public financing for them.\textsuperscript{120} Even the archbishop of Paris, Cardinal Lustiger, said he would support the version of the bill that went ahead to the Council of Ministers on April 18. When Savary’s bill entered the

\textsuperscript{116}Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 56.
\textsuperscript{117}Prost, 232.
\textsuperscript{118}Oberti, 83.
\textsuperscript{119}Private school teachers would also have new rights and responsibilities imposed on them by the state. In effect, \textit{la titularisation} would bring a large part of private pedagogy under state influence and undermine the powers of the head of a private establishment to discipline his staff. Christofferson, 144.
\textsuperscript{120}Savary, 90, 96-7, cited in ibid.
National Assembly, though, the Socialists made a devastating decision.

Socialist deputies who were ardent secularists ultimately doomed the successful completion of Savary's hard work. The deputies would not accept Savary's bill unless it had a more secularist tone. The bill also made concessions to private schools with which the Comité national d'action laïque (CNAL) disagreed, such as the guaranteed payment of private school teachers by the state and funds for basic school expenses. The bill entered a special committee in Parliament headed by André Laignel, a militant secularist, who was supported by Pierre Joxe, at the time the President of the Socialist parliamentary group. The committee altered the bill with six amendments. The "Laignel" amendments made municipal funding dependent on the number of certified teachers in a subsidized school, said private schools had to accept the titularisation after eight years or lose state funding, and generally implied the Left would continue to push for secularizing subsidized church schools. On May 22, 1984, the Savary bill was officially amended with the approval of the prime minister. The Socialists had unwittingly sabotaged their own education minister.

The new version of Savary's bill provoked outrage from the private school community. In an interview with Le Monde on June 5, Cardinal Lustiger explained that he was angry because Mauroy had broken a promise he made to private school leaders by allowing the proposed law to become a threat to the existence of the private school system. More important, private school

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121 These deputies still thought the bill was unacceptable because it forced communes (the municipal governments) to pay for subsidized private schools at the expense of public schools. Oberti, 88.
122 Maintenance would be the only responsibility left to diocesan authorities. Friend, Long Presidency, 57.
123 Friend has said the amendments did not seriously alter the thrust of the bill, affected only a small proportion of state payments for church education, and left a great deal of room for future adjudication. Ibid, 58. Christofferson wrote, "Those amendments made the bill into a provisional act, with the clear implication that the left would settle this matter once and for all at a later date." 144.
124 Mauroy found himself in a dilemma. The prime minister was under pressure from a majority of Socialist deputies and militant teachers' unions. If Mauroy had sided with Savary, the Socialist deputies might have helped pass a motion of censure against the government. Oberti, 90.
125 Christofferson, 150. Mauroy denied this charge on TV. Friend, Long Presidency, 58.
organizations, like the Union nationale des associations de parents d'élèves de l'enseignement libre (UNAPEL), dropped their support for the bill and started organizing an event which would adequately convey the public's disapproval to the government. On June 24, with the blessing of the Church, private school supporters executed the second largest demonstration in France's history. Between 1 and 1.4 million protestors marched through Paris in waves for twelve hours. After the bill passed its first reading in May of 1984, the French reacted negatively because it seemed as though the government wanted to end private education for purely ideological reasons. Fifty-five percent of the French thought the Savary bill infringed on liberties; fifty-six percent supported the June 24 protest. It seemed to the public the Left had attacked the freedom of education, hence the mass demonstration.

The Socialists began to regain control of the situation on July 7 when opposition member Charles Pasqua proposed to Mitterrand the option of submitting the question of reform to a national referendum. Mitterrand took advantage of the opportunity to withdraw the Savary bill without conceding to outright failure or causing outrage amongst Socialist deputies in Parliament. In order to call a referendum regarding the issue of "public liberties" in education a constitutional amendment was needed. Mitterrand strategically proposed a referendum to amend the constitution, a proposal which put the fate of the Savary bill in the Senate's hands. On July 14, 1984, Mitterrand withdrew Savary's legislation before it could enter the Senate for debate and pending the Senate's decision to allow the referendum. If the constitution was amended Savary's law would be voted on by the public, but the president knew the Senate would

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126 UNEAPEL was the largest Catholic PTA association, with 800,000 families in its membership. Christofferson, 150.
127 Friend, ibid, 58.
128 Christofferson, 145.
130 Le Monde, 7 July 1984, 8, cited in Oberti, 93.
131 Article 11 of the Fifth Republic's constitution did not include public liberties in the list of reasons why a referendum could be called.
not allow the constitution to be amended.\footnote{132} When the Senate announced it was blocking the referendum in September, Mitterrand could say that he had tried to save the reform and then bowed honorably to the weight of public opinion.\footnote{133} As an added bonus, Mitterrand emerged as a man eager to extend democracy, the protector of public liberty and defender of the constitution: this amounted to a much-needed redemption for the Left after having been accused of attacking liberty.\footnote{134}

A number of factors contributed to the events of the summer of 1984. Some of them were the fault of the Left and some were the fault of the government specifically. One factor was the attitude of militant secularists. Even though PS ministers had realized how unpopular the idea of secularizing the subsidized private schools was, militant secularists refused to believe that public opinion did not support their position.\footnote{135} These members of the Left still refused to accept the dual nature of church schools and insisted that the state should not support two systems.\footnote{136} Another factor was the Left's inability to present an attractive alternative to the private-school system, due to the poor condition of public schools. Church school supporters could rally behind the cry for "freedom of education" because they were justified in defending their children's chances at academic success. Secularization did not guarantee a more egalitarian society or an improvement in educational quality. Secularists simply did not have enough support for their arguments. Furthermore, the support they did have was no match for the highly organized advocacy for private schools. Secularists had chosen to persist with this matter at a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132]The Senate was wary, and rightfully so, of allowing Mitterrand to define the terms of the referendum in such a way that a 'yes' vote in favor of a constitutional change to allow referendums on liberty would reinforce the left's power. Christofferson, 152.
\item[133]Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 60. Mitterrand told his ministers in July that it was absurd to propose a law that everybody but the government opposed. Oberti, 95.
\item[134]Christofferson, 152-3.
\item[135]Certain officials of the National Committee on Secular Education went so far as to question the accuracy of the opinion poll Savary conducted. Savary said, "They did not believe it, or they pretended not to believe it." Savary, 127, quoted in Oberti, 47.
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time when parents of all school-children wanted the government to focus on reforming other aspects of education. When Savary attempted to address the problems of the educational systems, the conflict added by the church school debate helped to prevent any real success.

Actions taken by the government were also not conducive to Savary's success. The government had allowed the debate to be framed in terms of uniformity, which revived old fears of the Socialists wanting to collectivize everything. These fears were especially acute since the Left appeared to be more interested in secularization for the sake of following ideology, and not for the probability of beneficial results. The nature of the debate contributed to the failure of Savary's suggestion to decentralize the educational systems, which was criticized by both sides. Secularists did not want a reform that seemed to weaken the position of teachers and abandon administrative uniformity. The public was suspicious of the innovations mentioned by Savary's bill. Too many people believed experimentation prior to 1981 had wrecked public education and any government interference in the educational system was automatically bad, even though the proposal encouraged decreased bureaucracy. Overall a fear developed that the quality of education would decline further because of Savary's proposals. The conservative Right also fed this fear by claiming the plan was meant to indoctrinate students.

Finally, the government had allowed the Laignel amendments. The retraction of Mauroy's perceived promise not to nationalize private schools overwhelmed the endorsement the bill did have. Teachers endorsed the proposals to decentralize and only thirty-five percent of the

136 Savary, 149, cited in ibid, 67.
138 "The success of the Catholic Church was a reflection of the Left's inability to put political or social content into concepts like freedom or equality." Singer, 186.
139 Abandoning uniformity meant threatening the equality of citizens and the unity of the nation, to some Leftists. Prost, 233. Secularists also feared that decentralization would weaken teachers' unions, which were organized on a national basis and ill-equipped to deal with local authorities. Pierre Favier and Martin Martin-Roland, La décennie Mitterrand, vol. 2 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991), 111, cited in Oberti, 85.
140 Friend, ibid, 64.
bill's opponents felt that private education should not be required to follow the same rules as public. Moderates supporting the private system had been willing to negotiate as long as the state did not threaten their schools' independence. During the negotiations, the Church had established the accepted limits of the state's encroachment. Private-school officials did not want state officials participating in administrative roles, nor would they accept any measures that could cause a scenario wherein the state might inadvertently dissolve the private-school system. The Church had refused to let private schools fall under the rules regulating districts for public schools because doing so would infringe on the freedom to teach. As long as the proposals did not limit the academic freedom of church schools or indicate the possibility of future limitations, negotiators from private schools were willing to make a deal. When the government allowed the bill to acquire a blatantly secularist tone, threatening future integration, any support the Savary project had evaporated.

The government succeeded, though, despite the temporary setback of July 1984. The next education minister, Chevènement, was a man capable of handling the aftermath of the church school affair and he became popular with the public. Chevènement and Fabius quickly devised a deal with private schools so the issue would no longer be the center of attention. Chevènement redirected educational policy toward the issue the people had wanted addressed all along, greater educational opportunity. By keeping things simple, without talking about reforms or experiments, Chevènement proceeded using Savary's work as a guide. Chevènement adopted many of Savary's practical measures and implemented much of what Savary had envisioned

141 Prost, 233.
142 Ibid, 232.
143 In December of 1984 Fabius also rescinded the concessions of the 1977 law, which even the church officials had thought unfair to the public school system, and reaffirmed the primacy of the Débré law. Friend, *Long Presidency*, 64.
without causing the private schools to feel threatened by state usurpation.\textsuperscript{144} By late 1984 the issue of subsidizing private schools had been diffused. It did not matter that a 'great unified and secular education system' had not materialized because in 1981 Mitterrand declared this was not Savary's goal. The achievement was the eventual settlement of the church school dispute, accomplished by negotiation and consideration for the public, using a PS minister's solutions.

The PS succeeded at taking another step toward a socialism better suited for the late twentieth century. Mitterrand said, in retrospect, that it was necessary to let the ordeal unfold, to let the extreme secularists see that the country was not with them.\textsuperscript{145} The Left gave up its deeply felt, archaic commitment to the completely lay and secular republic and re-aligned its objectives to correspond with the modern issues needing attention in the area of education. Savary, too, had not been an abject failure, for he really had found a plausible solution. The problem had not been the quality of Savary's proposals, but the manner in which the public understood them. Chevenement, as Savary's successor, even said that the key points to Savary's project were lost in interpretation by the press and word of mouth; most of the French had really reacted to distortions they had heard.\textsuperscript{146} Subsequent reforms influenced by Savary allowed the private and public systems to operate similarly and in an atmosphere of "peaceful coexistence."\textsuperscript{147} Savary's work also inspired reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s which have considerably democratized French education.\textsuperscript{148}

The Rainbow Warrior Affair

\textsuperscript{144} Christofferson, 209.
\textsuperscript{145} Friend, ibid, 60.
\textsuperscript{148} Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 170.
The Rainbow Warrior crisis, or as the Parisian press came to call it, France's 'Watergate', began on July 10, 1985, when a team from France's external intelligence service, the Direction Générale de Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), blew up the hull of The Greenpeace Organization's flagship, Rainbow Warrior, causing it to sink and killing one of the people on board. This event was the culmination of fifteen years of French nuclear testing in the South Pacific and subsequent protests by the region's people and Greenpeace. The Socialists began their term favoring the development of France's nuclear deterrent. They also supported 'human causes,' such as the abolition of the death penalty and empowering the impoverished, and a program of regionalism and increased autonomy for French territories. The party’s position on nuclear testing proved to be in direct conflict with the positions on greater human equality. The Socialists contradicted themselves as the government ignored the wishes of natives in French Polynesia and on the island of New Caledonia. The Rainbow Warrior scandal and the concurrent problems in New Caledonia represented the transition of PS policy to one of realpolitik, at least in the South Pacific region.

The Rainbow Warrior incident was the outcome of larger conflicts between South Pacific nations and France, which included the debate over granting independence to the French territory of New Caledonia. Until 1981 the French government's policy on New Caledonia had been to increase autonomy under the auspices of the territory's "national" parties. The Socialist program of 1981 had promised to benefit the people on the periphery of French society (the provinces, the oppressed and the poor) but problems quickly prevented most of the program from

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149 In the 1980s, The Greenpeace Organization was known for protesting against the hunting of whales and the testing of nuclear weapons.
150 Christofferson, 215. The PS moved away from an emphasis on nuclear weapons disarmament in 1978 for a few reasons, including their assessment of international developments, especially the Soviet military build-up in Eastern Europe. "From then on, the Party saw the force de frappe as a bulwark of French independence that would prevent both a return to NATO and the establishment of a West European defense system...," Stanley Hoffman, "Mitterrand's Foreign Policy, or Gaullism by any other Name," in The Mitterrand Experiment, 295.
being implemented: "Nowhere was this program implemented less than in the overseas territories and departments." The PS had promised the natives of New Caledonia, the Kanaks, the right to self-determination in 1979, perhaps without considering how the French citizens living in the territory would react to such an initiative. The ambiguous PS plan as of 1981 was "to increase self-determination on a regional basis and explore an autonomy that might lead to independence inside the French Community." However, the Socialists decided not to challenge the political power of French residents in New Caledonia so the PS did not fulfill its pledge to the Kanaks. The PS had again set itself up for political turmoil because of a vague "Socialist" plan.

The French interests in New Caledonia included huge nickel deposits and 40 million square kilometers of sea under the territory's control. In political circles and the press concerns arose over the fate of non-Kanak residents and the potential effects on the rest of the South Pacific if New Caledonia gained independence. By 1985 the situation became violent and forced the PS to appoint a special delegate to New Caledonia, Edgard Pisani. Pisani was supposed to figure out how to expedite the process of granting autonomy. He suggested the government vote immediately on recognizing the sovereignty of New Caledonia. The Council of Ministers agreed to hold elections to four regional councils on the island in 1985, but put off the issue of independence by postponing a referendum on the matter until 1987. On September 29,

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153 In the DOM-TOM (the départements d'outre mer et territoires d'outre mer) some major problems included high unemployment, a dual society of wealthy French bureaucrats and impoverished local citizens, and a poor export record. The natives of French Polynesia and New Caledonia attracted sympathy because they were seen as helpless communities forced to be dependent on their imperial power's economic aid. The PS government stood accused of exploitation. Christofferson, 213. New Caledonia was "by far the most troublesome of France's overseas territories." John Keebler and Alec Stone, "Judicial-Political Confrontation in Mitterrand's France," in *The Mitterrand Experiment*, 173.

154 Le *Nouvel Observateur*, a journal with new-left leanings, raised concerns about the potential for a dictatorship to emerge on the island or the possibility of the "domino effect" in the South Pacific. Christofferson, 214.
1985, the Kanaks won in three of four regions. By the time this happened, however, "the left had lost its desire to liberate the wretched of the earth." The PS response to Greenpeace protests against the testing of French nuclear weapons reflected this loss of enthusiasm for championing human causes.

As the situation on New Caledonia unfolded, France's testing of nuclear weapons on Mururoa Atoll drew increased criticism from New Zealand, Australia and the Greenpeace movement. The South Pacific Forum, critical of the PS government for not listening to the region's natives, called for independence in New Caledonia and an end to French nuclear testing in the region. In response to the South Pacific's expressed dissatisfaction with French operations in the region, Mitterrand ordered a fortification of France's military forces in Polynesia and New Caledonia. The PS government justified the development of France's nuclear force by insisting it was the strongest guarantee of political independence from superpowers. Consequently, the PS refused to sign the regional treaty of Rarotonga, which declared the South Pacific a nuclear-free zone.

The Rainbow Warrior sat in Auckland Harbor during the summer of 1985 as Greenpeace prepared to protest a series of tests planned for September. Greenpeace protests against...
France's nuclear testing in that part of the world had been going on for years. One French government official described the protests as a common occurrence. "They sail to the boundary of our test area. A French naval vessel tells them they can't go further. They scream and complain and that's it."\(^{161}\) However, the Greenpeace protesters were not present to passively proclaim their unhappiness with French nuclear tests. In fact, French authorities may have had good reason to worry about the possible outcome of the upcoming encounter with Greenpeace. First of all, a history of conflicts existed between the French naval authorities controlling security at Mururoa and Greenpeace members.\(^{162}\) Second, Greenpeace plans indicated the organization actually meant to interfere with French activities.\(^{163}\) One goal of the ship's crew was to look for evidence of claims of a significant radioactivity leak, which was alleged to have happened after a May 8 test.\(^{164}\) *Rainbow Warrior* and the vessel sent to replace it, *Greenpeace*, even had sophisticated detection apparatuses.\(^{165}\)

Protesting the tests at a safe distance was one thing; provoking an encounter with French naval security, with the objective of actively disrupting the advancement of France's nuclear capabilities was something entirely different. Greenpeace had implied it would proceed with actions too intrusive for France's comfort. "High officials of French intelligence...convinced themselves that the Greenpeace expedition was a major menace to their nuclear testing..."\(^{166}\) The

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\(^{162}\) In 1972 a "near battle" occurred; afterwards French naval authorities sabotaged Greenpeace boats numerous times. Friend, *Long Presidency*, 71.

\(^{163}\) Greenpeace proposed to sail into Mururoa waters with the *Rainbow Warrior* and three smaller craft, making it more difficult for the French navy to board and intercept them all." Ibid.

\(^{164}\) Dickson, 948.

\(^{165}\) The Socialist government insisted Mururoa had not suffered environmental damage, a fact confirmed by an international scientific team. Greenpeace also had satellite broadcasting equipment on board so they could televise any incidents that might occur. Ibid.

admiral in charge of French nuclear tests asked the Minister of Defense, Charles Hernu, to do something about the *Rainbow Warrior*’s presence in early March.

Most of the details surrounding the ship’s sinking were not known until *Le Monde* published its investigative account of the operation on September 17, 1985. The PS government denied DGSE involvement until late September, confessing only after the newspaper exposed France’s role. When Prime Minister Fabius finally went on T.V. to address the public, he admitted French agents planted the bombs on the ship and had been acting under orders. Ultimately Fabius said he believed Defense Minister Charles Hernu and DGSE chief Admiral Pierre Lacoste were responsible for the *Rainbow Warrior* bombing. What happened after July 10 cannot be summed up, however, simply by saying both the DGSE and government officials in Paris publicly denied France’s involvement in the sinking of the Greenpeace vessel until a newspaper disclosed the details. From July 10 until the end of September, the government’s attempted cover-up generated just as much criticism, and perhaps more, as the actual bombing of the ship. The amount of damage this event caused the PS was debatable, however.

After *Rainbow Warrior* sank, according to Singer, “Were it not for the nuclear background and the tragic death, what followed was farcical.” The assailants made the New Zealand authorities’ job rather easy. Investigators found a “distinctive gray-and-black dinghy” commonly used in the French navy floating in the harbor near the wrecked ship. The oxygen tanks, bearing French registration marks, used by the divers washed up on a nearby beach. The

In early July DGSE agent Louis-Pierre Dillais arrived in Auckland as the overall leader of the attack on *Rainbow Warrior*. The word chosen for the operation was “anticiper” – to forstall the ship’s sailing into Polynesian waters. No one was supposed to be hurt, and the ship was not supposed to be destroyed, just sunk. On July 10, a team of French frogmen sabotaged the ship with explosives they smuggled into the country on a chartered yacht, the *Ouvea*. Two days later New Zealand authorities arrested two DGSE agents posing as a Swiss couple with fake passports. Eventually two more DGSE agents were detained rather quickly because of the trail of evidence they left behind. Details taken from *Le Monde*, 9-17-85, cited in Friend, *The Long Presidency*, 71-72, and Spencer Reiss, “France’s ’Watergate’”, *Newsweek*, September 30, 1985, 36. Academic Search Premier. http://search.ebscohost.com.

Singer, 203
agents even left eyewitnesses, Greenpeace employees who saw a van pick up a diver a few hours before the explosions.\textsuperscript{170} French agents made traceable phone calls to Paris, including the Defense Ministry. Even as evidence mounted proving French guilt, Defense Minister Charles Hernu assured the PS government that his ministry and the DGSE were not involved. Hernu even denied at first that the suspects in New Zealand’s custody were DGSE agents.\textsuperscript{171} Mitterrand publicly defended Hernu, while Fabius desperately tried to figure out what had actually happened in Auckland. Fabius pressured Hernu for details but the defense minister refused to either take responsibility for the operation or name the person who was responsible.\textsuperscript{172}

In addition to claims that government condoned the attack, after July the PS was accused of lying to the public by trying to cover up French culpability. On August 6, with the press persistently revealing more details implicating France, Mitterrand and Fabius met to discuss the appointment of an independent inquiry. Bernard Tricot, General de Gaulle’s former chief of staff and a member of the opposition, led a brief investigation that concluded with the publishing of a report on August 25. The DGSE and Hernu told Tricot they did have agents in Auckland performing surveillance, but denied the agents’ role in the explosion. This implausible claim was all the more unbelievable because the four agents in custody had already admitted to being veteran combat divers from the DGSE. Tricot took the perspective that “too much evidence” had been left behind to be credible.\textsuperscript{173} The Tricot Report endorsed the claim of French innocence and consequently became the foundation for accusations of a Socialist ‘whitewash.’

Tricot’s findings served only to intensify suspicions of French guilt. The government

\textsuperscript{169}"Uncovering a French Connection"
\textsuperscript{170}The van’s description led investigators to the two agents originally arrested. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171}Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 72. "This led to some comic misunderstandings, as the French police acting on queries from New Zealand, were discovering more and more proofs, while the military, from the minister downward, were denying with abandon." Singer, 204.
\textsuperscript{172}"Fabius insisted that Hernu come clean and succeeded only in stiffening his resistance." Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 72.
might have been praised for starting an investigation, but instead more questions arose as to why Mitterrand had waited until three weeks after the DGSE agents’ detainment to order the inquest.\textsuperscript{174} Furthermore, Tricot acknowledged during a TV appearance on August 26 that his sources might have tried to deceive him.\textsuperscript{175} The PS attempt to clear up the matter failed and only 17\% of the public said they believed the report.\textsuperscript{176} The public heard the whole truth for the first time in \textit{Le Monde’s} story of September 17. Basing itself on interviews with military and intelligence officers, high-ranking cabinet ministers and opposition political leaders, the paper concluded that French security officials – Hernu, Lacoste and military chief of staff General Jean Saulnier – “may have” knowingly “either authorized [the operation] or allowed [it] to take place.”\textsuperscript{177}

Two days after the exposé Mitterrand wrote Fabius a letter demanding answers from the French intelligence services. Hernu accordingly confronted Lacoste, who refused to answer accusations in writing as Hernu had requested. Fabius fired Lacoste immediately, stating Lacoste had created “an impossible situation” and left him no other option.\textsuperscript{178} Hernu was also forced to resign on the same day. Fabius appointed Paul Quilès to take Hernu’s place and ordered the new defense minister to conduct another investigation. After Quilès’s queries Fabius made two TV appearances. During the first he said only that “unnamed government officials” gave the orders to blow up the ship. Having aroused public indignation, Fabius had to appear again and name names. Even though neither Hernu nor Lacoste admitted to giving the order

\textsuperscript{173}Tricot announced this conclusion in a TV interview. Dickson, 948.
\textsuperscript{174}Reiß
\textsuperscript{175}Tricot said, “I do not exclude that I was led astray.” Singer, 205.
\textsuperscript{176}Friend, \textit{Long Presidency}, 72.
\textsuperscript{177}Even after this revelation Hernu still insisted that no one from his ministry was involved in the explosions. He denounced the story as a “slander campaign”. Reiss.
\textsuperscript{178}Ibid.
Fabius told the country, “my conviction is that the responsibility was at their level.”179 This admission only provoked more skepticism because, as Libération pointed out, “Fabius would be more convincing if Hernu agreed to accept the responsibility that is attributed to him.”180

Speculation abounded about who in the PS knew what and when they knew it. Government critics could legitimately accuse the Defense Minister (the minister directly responsible), the Prime Minister (officially charged with coordinating government policy), and the President (the ultimate power broker in the sphere of defense policy).181 The president should have known because his associates should have taken the plan to him for approval, but this did not automatically prove his guilt. 182 It was entirely conceivable that Mitterrand’s staff acted without his knowledge in order to preserve “plausible deniability.”183 Certainly, on July 10, the president and the prime minister learned of the bombing and immediately understood that French services were involved.184 It was clear that at least Mitterrand’s chief of staff, General Jean Saulnier, knew of some sort of operation because he had to sign for the $500,000 used to fund it.185 Interior Minister Pierre Joxe also implicated himself in the cover-up. When Joxe

179 Friend, Long Presidency, 73.
181 Cole, 40. Mitterrand hesitated to hold Hernu responsible, as he was both popular with the military and a member of Mitterrand’s inner circle. Mitterrand did blame Fabius in part for losing Hernu because of the PM’s ineffective coordination of government policy.
183 Tiersky, 263
184 To those who believed the president had limited knowledge about the operation to disable the ship, Mitterrand consented only to “forestalling” the Rainbow Warrior, i.e. he did not know particularly what “forestalling” entailed. Friend, Long Presidency, 72. “The president’s personal involvement…was probably that he gave a general instruction to stop interference with France’s nuclear testing but was astonished at the methods, the clumsiness, and the tragedy of what was done.” Tiersky, 263.
185 In La décennie Mitterrand, Favier and Martin-Roland claimed neither Saulnier nor Mitterrand had been briefed on the details of the plan. Friend, ibid, 72. Singer agreed Mitterrand was “in the picture…in broad terms” because of the financial aspect. “The president may well have been told by Admiral Lacoste that 'there will be no victim, no trace, and France will not be implicated.'” Jacques Derogy and Jean-Marie Pontaut, Enquête sur trois secrets d’état
learned the DGSE agents called the defense ministry from Auckland, he had all of the ministry’s phone numbers changed. The government could escape direct responsibility for the details of the Rainbow Warrior scheme but clearly the PS was guilty of trying to hide France’s involvement and failing at that task miserably.

The government was disparaged for the actual bombing, the failure of the DGSE agents, the shoddy cover-up, and the official version of events given by Fabius at the end of September. An assessment of the amount of damage the Rainbow Warrior affair caused for the PS was dependent upon the amount of blame attributed to the Socialist government. Members of the government were either guilty of directing a highly flawed operation and heading a messy cover up, or they were just guilty of the cover up. Domestically, some members of the opposition were determined to hold the government responsible. Fortunately for Fabius and other ministers, no evidence emerged implicating them directly. The government could rebuke some of the accusations thrown at it, which lessened the amount of harm done to the party. In France, widespread public support for France’s independent nuclear deterrent and the testing program needed for improvements also minimized political damage. The French were more interested in controlling the situation on New Caledonia and protecting their rights to nuclear testing than they were in bringing the Rainbow Warrior culprits to justice. The PS still had to accept some justified criticism. Overall, however, the crisis was not nearly as hazardous as it had first seemed.


186 Friend, ibid, 72.

187 Senate Whip Charles Pasqua, a member of Rally Pour la République (RPR), said, “If it is proved that the French secret services are implicated in this affair then the responsibility could not be sought anywhere except at the level of Premier.” Janice Simpson, “France the Captain Who Caused a Furor,” Time, September 2, 1985. Time Archives. http://www.time.com.proxy.bsu.edu/time/archive/.

188 Christofferson, 216. Chairman of the Senate Laws Committee, Jacques Larché, conveyed this sentiment by saying, “We have legitimate interests in the Pacific. The only thing that I reproach about the affair is that it failed,” Simpson. Both Christofferson and Friend agreed that the PS escaped any real damage to its public image.
Le Monde's story merely proved the guilt of a French agency and identified the figures who might have been or most likely were responsible. To those who believed the highest officials knew the intimate details of the operation before July 10, the PS government looked ridiculous. The mere association of a French agency, acting on government orders, with such a poorly-planned and executed operation was embarrassing for the PS, irrespective of who was specifically liable for this debacle. “The bombing seemed to have been organized with all the bumbling finesse of an Inspector Clouseau rather than the cool efficiency of a John le Carré operative,” a report in Time chided. However, the failure of the operation was not shouldered by the government because no one could provide definitive evidence suggesting that it knew the specifics of the plan. In a way the utter foolishness of the bombing scheme benefited PS party members claiming innocence. To believe that Mitterrand had consented to the exact plan and knew all the details meant believing the president had approved of a plan that anyone with political sense would have vetoed.

The Socialists also had a small measure of reasonable doubt to support their side of the story. Other facts also existed which implied there was at least some probability government officials had not known exactly what would happen to Rainbow Warrior. Politician Bernard Stasi, who was France’s Minister for Overseas Territories from 1973-1974 and a member of the centrist opposition, told reporters the DGSE had begun plotting against Greenpeace ten years earlier. This suggested the DGSE had formulated the attack on Greenpeace themselves and without government commands. Other government insiders also speculated that a maverick

189“Uncovering a French Connection.” DGSE agents, embarrassed by the discovery of their agents’ actions, pointed to the secret services of other nations including the U.S., the Soviet Union and Great Britain. The DGSE said these other services must have tipped off the New Zealand police. Dickson, 949.
190Bell, 111.
191Simpson. Stanley Hoffman has said this affair was "a result of the defense establishment's nuclear obsession," which implied that the bombing was at least urged by figures outside of the government. Hoffman, 302.
faction inside the intelligence agency could have acted of their own volition.\textsuperscript{192} These suspicions, combined with the fact that nobody could prove Mitterrand, Fabius, or Hernu had known the outline of the operation or that Hernu had given the order, presented an opportunity to point fingers elsewhere. It harmed the PS officials to do this, however, because the suggestion of a renegade intelligence force introduced another criticism. It looked as though the government had lost effective political control over the secret service's activities.\textsuperscript{193}

Most of the damage to the government's reputation was in large part due to the denials issued from Paris and the clumsy effort to conceal France's involvement in the bombing.\textsuperscript{194} The PS leaders, eager to prove they could not be held accountable for Rainbow Warrior, did not make themselves appear any better by claiming they were not aware of the DGSE mission. The government's perceived lack of knowledge sparked charges of PS ineptitude, but the entire government was not in charge foreign policy; this area was reserved for the president. The Party's contribution to the decision-making process in foreign affairs was nil.\textsuperscript{195} As the man who claimed he was the core of French deterrence, Mitterrand arguably should have known more than the rest of the PS about the events in the Pacific. The fact that he apparently did not know about the plan for the bombing reflected poorly on him.\textsuperscript{196} The day after Le Monde published its report Mitterrand displayed his frustration during a cabinet meeting: "Mitterrand exploded, banging his fist on the table and repeating, 'I want to know, I want to know!'"\textsuperscript{197} The president also appeared

\textsuperscript{192}"Uncovering a French Connection" Le Canard Enchaine speculated at one point that the directives originated within the DGSE without the knowledge of Hernu. Both Fabius and Hernu hinted that the DGSE operation might have been sabotaged by anti-Socialist elements within the intelligence services in order to embarrass the government. Lacoste's replacement, Army Chief of Staff General Rene Imbot, also suggested this allegation. After he assumed control of the DGSE Imbot said, "There has been a plot to destabilize and destroy the intelligence services." Sancton.
\textsuperscript{193}Cole, 40.
\textsuperscript{194}Friend, Long Presidency, 73.
\textsuperscript{195}Hoffman, 296.
\textsuperscript{196}"The demands made by him to know what had happened after details were published in the press show his capacities in a very bad light." Bell, 111.
\textsuperscript{197}Reiss.
to have been deceived by other high ranking officials. One widely shared view was that the whole affair made the president look like a fool. In this respect Mitterrand’s image was tarnished.

Prime Minister Fabius, as a representative of the Socialists, contributed to the damaged credibility of the PS. During the scandal Fabius came across as less than a strong leader. In a policy area dominated by the president, Fabius was lost as he tried to determine who was responsible. He looked like a prime minister who could not extract explanations out of his own cabinet members. After reversing his statement of official denial and naming Hernu as a responsible party, Fabius was accused of using Hernu as a scapegoat to cover his and Mitterrand’s part in the scandal. Jacques Toubon, the secretary-general of an opposition party, Rally Pour la Republique (RPR), was one of the Prime Minister's detractors. He claimed Fabius was either dishonest, having blamed someone else to save himself, or incompetent in a sharp comment he made about Fabius’ final account of the affair. Fabius might have had no role in planning the Rainbow Warrior bombing, but he still had to take heat for the affair as Prime Minister.

Endorsing the findings of the Tricot Report was another blunder by party members. It was glaringly obvious by the time of the report’s release that France had been involved in the bombings. Outlandish allegations made by Socialist officials charging other nations’ intelligence agencies with espionage were just silly. Hernu claimed the operation might have been a British

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198 Ibid.
199 Giesbert also accused Mitterrand of using Hernu as a scapegoat; Mitterrand, however, was very upset to lose his old friend as the Defense Minister. Friend has declared Hernu was absolutely not a scapegoat because, “the responsibility for approving an operation foolish in conception and bungled in execution was clearly his.” Friend, Long Presidency, 73.
200 Toubon said, “Either Fabius is a liar and seeks to save himself by burying others…or he knows nothing, sees nothing and controls nothing and is therefore rather incompetent.” Sancton.
secret service scheme to weaken France's image and political credit. Information leaks from government agencies damaged the Party's reputation, too. Four agents from the DGSE were arrested for revealing facts about the Greenpeace to the press. Well-placed sources claimed much of the information in Le Monde's story of September 17 came from Joxe's Interior Ministry. The Socialist government was unable to deny that some of its members lacked the discipline that was needed to keep the Rainbow Warrior affair quiet. This was a serious problem because the government was, after all, in charge of national security. The ordeal called into question the Socialists' ability to manage military affairs and international disputes. Confidence in the government was at stake.

The saving grace in this situation for the Socialists was the French attitude towards their government's nuclear tests. Despite Le Monde's questioning of Fabius' final account of events, the paper published two editorials on September 25 which argued against pursuing the issue further to avoid hurting French interests. The French widely supported their country's nuclear program and had little patience for groups like Greenpeace who opposed it, hence the absence of a public outrage aimed at condemning the bombing. Some of the public even praised the defense minister for the covert action, which might have been accepted by the French as a necessary defensive measure. Even though a Sofres-Le Figaro poll conducted during the week

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201 Tiersky called this an absurd allegation. "Another hypothesis was a possible neo-gaulleist machination designed to discredit the left-wing government.” Tiersky, 263.
202 Supposedly the Ministry wanted to pre-empt any speculation about the president’s involvement in the affair. Reiss.
203 Gen. Imbot’s first assignment was to reorganize the DGSE. The agents arrested were indicted on charges of revealing secrets “damaging to the national defense.” Sancton.
204 Le Monde noted the “chronological vacuum”; the paper asked why it took the government from July until September to confirm that French operatives had carried out the bombing. Ibid. One editorial, “Apaiser Wellington,” noted that no one except ‘hard-core ecologists’ even wanted to pursue the issue. The other editorial was written by André Fontaine, the nation’s leading diplomatic correspondent. Christofferson, 215-16.
205 Simpson. Friend has said the general public remained unexcited about the affair. Friend, Long Presidency, 73.
206 Friend has also reported that the overall view of the part of the public that was "uninformed" was captured by this quote from a French cab driver: “Terrific, that Hernu! He was damn well right to sink that Russian boat!” Friend, “A Rose in Any Other Fist Would Smell as Sweet.” French Politics and Society 4, Dec. 1985, quoted in Long
of Fabius’ televised ‘confession’ indicated 52% of the French believed Fabius and Mitterrand knew beforehand about the planned bombing and 78% condemned the decision to blow up the ship. Mitterrand's and Fabius’s poll ratings did not sink. Even Hernu remained popular.

Although the Socialists avoided a severe backlash in France, after the attack the government had to deal with the repercussions in the international arena. The most immediate relationship impacted was the one between France and New Zealand. Blowing up the ship in Auckland’s harbor was a violation of New Zealand’s national sovereignty. David Lange, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, condemned the incident as “a major criminal act with terrorist overtones.” Being held accountable for what amounted to a terrorist act in at least some minds was damaging for the PS. Lange also chastised the French for having an insensitive attitude regarding the matter. However, relations with the South Pacific had been in trouble for years. The scandal just aggravated existing diplomatic problems between France and the region over New Caledonia and nuclear testing.

The president might have emerged from the affair looking weak in some aspects, but he showed himself capable of protecting France’s nuclear development program. Amidst all of the controversy concerning the affair, Mitterrand stood firmly defiant to the South Pacific’s demands and warned that any attempt to interfere with France’s nuclear tests would still be met with force if necessary. In a strongly worded statement issued from Paris the president declared, “The French tests will continue as long as they are judged necessary for the defense of the country by the French authorities, and by these authorities alone.” He also challenged the legitimacy of Greenpeace as an ecological movement, implying that the organization intended to undermine

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**Presidency, 73**

207Sancton and Friend, ibid, 73.

208“Uncovering a French Connection”

209Simpson
French power. At the end of the ordeal opinion polls actually registered a new confidence in Mitterrand.

The experience in the South Pacific was another valuable lesson for the PS. The Socialists cannot be blamed for the failure of the operation because no evidence existed to suggest they were responsible for the creation of the scheme. The failure of methods used by the agents was not the party’s fault either. However, the Socialists had again realized that their initiatives needed to be revised after considering the existing conditions, in this case, of the South Pacific and nuclear tests. The government did fail to adhere to the party ideals regarding the downtrodden and those from the outer regions of society. The government had also acted in an unexpected manner against a group that Socialists could relate to, given the party's affiliation with unions and other grassroots movements: “The affair showed that even a Socialist government may have to choose against well-meaning grassroots activists in favor of national defense traditionally conceived.” The government had succeeded, though, at protecting a policy favored by the party and the French people. The Socialists saw again an instance where their initial objectives had to be put aside in order to guarantee a chance for the party’s political survival and to sustain policy coherence.

Conclusion

The PS was successful in government, even though it did not accomplish what the party had planned prior to 1981. Mitterrand and his ministers implemented Socialist proposals

210Dickson, 948.
211Mitterrand said Greenpeace was engaged in “political agitation hostile to the French presence” in the South Pacific. Christofferson, 216.
212Bell, 110.
213“The Rainbow Warrior Affair was a confirmation that in foreign policy as well as domestic affairs, the French government’s only link with socialism by that time was its name.” Singer, 208.
214Tiersky, 264.
regarding the economy and secularization and attempted to relieve the stress of the
disenfranchised in France's overseas territories. They discovered, however, that the party's
initiatives did not work well when applied to real-world conditions. The Socialists had the
option of pursuing failing policies, but instead the leadership chose to consider the circumstances
of each problem faced and to rethink their guiding principles. The government then succeeded
by refocusing its goals and coordinating them to address the issues influencing France. Hence,
the government did not fail to make socialism work. Rather it was successful at revealing how
some long-held socialist ideas were incompatible with the current state of the nation.

The government from 1981 to 1986 also symbolized achievement for the PS a party. The
party allowed the events of this period to reshape its beliefs. The three crises established how
old Socialist policies were not sufficient to address the modern problems and conditions of
France. Encountering each situation proved to party members that current factors had to be
taken into consideration before developing a program for government. Ideas on economic policy
had to take into consideration the fact that France participated in a global economy; in cultural
policy, subduing the Catholic Church was no longer a major concern of the population; in
foreign policy, the importance of nuclear testing was overwhelming. The lessons of these
experiences were applied to party ideology. Ironically, the economic crisis, the church school
affair and the *Rainbow Warrior* scandal were actually beneficial to the PS. The party
leadership's ability to adapt helped guarantee the political survival of the PS because the
Socialists had shown the French that they were capable of governing the country. After 1986 the
PS did not have worry about being perceived as a party that only revolutionaries of the Left
would vote for. The PS became a viable option for an increased number of France's electorate, a
major achievement confirmed in 1988 when the party returned to government after suffering the
legislative defeat of 1986.
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