

# France

The *gloire* has dimmed, but France's mystique endures. When Americans travel there, as some half a million do each year, they have two nations in mind. One is the land where the word civilization was coined, where Descartes, Rousseau, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Hugo, de Gaulle, and others still loom large. Then there is "the real France," a term suggesting an almost 19th-century world of swaying poplars, old chateaux, peasants, bistros, and beaches washed by sun and Mediterranean or Atlantic breezes. The reality is that since World War II, the French, now 55 million strong, have built one of the Free World's top four industrial powers. Their belated move into the late 20th century has brought both blessings and problems; in parliamentary elections this March, high unemployment (11 percent) and other ills may hurt President François Mitterrand's Socialists, who in 1981 formed France's first left-wing government in 23 years. Here, John Ardagh looks at how the Great Leap was accomplished and how French life has changed in the process. Diana Pinto examines the evolution of that hardy Gallic perennial, the intellectual.

## HOW THE FRENCH GOT A NEW START

*by John Ardagh*

Charles de Gaulle loved France, but he never thought much of the French. "They can't cope without the State, yet they detest it," he said in 1966. "They don't behave like adults."

The Fifth Republic created by the Gaullists in 1959 ended the governmental disarray that plagued their predecessors. But the unruly French would persist in other irritatingly non-Gaullist patterns, including a love-hate relationship with things Anglo-Saxon. During the 1960s and '70s, one or two Wimpy's and McDonald's opened on the Champs Elysées, leading a new trend in *le fast-food*. *Le Drugstore*, a new kind of shop open till mid-

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night with glitzy décor, restaurants, and toys, books, Scotch salmon, champagne, and much else besides medicine, became a hit. Movie and pop music stars with names like Johnny Hallyday (né Jean-Philippe Smet) and Françoise Hardy were born.

Was France losing its essence, becoming Americanized, as the press pundits said? One sign was the spread of *franglais*. Boutiques took names like *Le Smart Shop*. People spoke of *le parking*, *le business car*, *le planning*, *le marketing*, *le cash-flow*, *le pipeline*, *le snack*, *un long-drink*, *le barman*, *le shopping*, *le pull* (sweater), *le smoking* (dinner jacket), *le jogging*, and *le footing* (walking). Advertisers offered *grand-standing* homes and *l'après-shampooing*. There was shock when Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, on the day of his 1974 election as president, made a speech for foreign television in English.

Some patriots sought to Gallicize *franglais*, to turn the linguistic *bulldozer* into a *beuledozère*. In 1977, the Gaullists all but banned the use of foreign words, where equivalent French terms existed, in ads, on official documents, and on radio and TV—a step described as the “cultural crime of a crackpot nation” by a London columnist. *Franglais* waned, though even today no French oil company executive will speak of *un appareil de forage en mer* when he is making a deal on *un oil-rig*.

*Franglais* was a telling if trivial symptom. The French were encountering something that other Western Europeans had experienced much earlier: economic and social modernization.

At first, the modernization went almost unnoticed. While American headline-writers focused on the chaotic politics and agonizing colonial retreats of the 1947–59 Fourth Republic, France was transforming itself. Industrial output regained its pre-war peak by 1951 and kept on climbing—more than tripling by 1973. Once dependent on farming and known for exports of wine, perfumes, and *haute couture*, the French became leading competitors in autos, aeronautics, offshore oil, aluminum, nuclear power, and much else. By the 1970s, *la gloire française* was not so much military or cultural as commercial.

By 1985, France's per capita gross domestic product had reached \$9,538. That put it behind Switzerland (\$14,930), the United States (\$13,969), and West Germany (\$10,633) but well

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*Rodin's bronze of Balzac, the chronicler of 19th-century society (Père Goriot, Le Cousin Pons), surveys the human comedy in the Paris Métro.*

ahead of its old rival, Britain (\$8,072). The French passed the British in both economic output and standard of living in 1967.

Despite the lingering presence of a post-1973 recession (including more than two million unemployed), France's prosperity today is undeniable. The French have money to spend. Before World War II, *half* the average family's budget went to food and drink; today, only 20 percent does. By 1983, 96 percent of French households had a refrigerator, 91 percent had a TV set, 73 percent had a car (the U.S. figure: 90 percent). As high a proportion of blue-collar workers as salaried white-collar *cadres supérieurs* (89 percent) had automatic washing machines.

The French have become cleaner and more health-conscious. Their "health and hygiene" expenses have more than tripled since the 1950s, and they now outspend everyone else (including Americans, by 50 percent) on patent and prescription medicines. With 22.3 million dogs, cats, and caged birds, they have overtaken even the British as pet-keepers. They crowd new "garden centers" outside many towns and have taken to the once-scorned endeavor of *le bricolage*, do-it-yourself home improvement. One in nine French families (versus one in 15 in America) has a weekend or vacation retreat.

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They have also become great tourists, and by 1980 one in four of their trips took them abroad. (The United States, a popular destination, drew 323,000 French visitors in 1984.) One of Mitterrand's first steps was to mandate a fifth week of paid vacation for workers. In the new factory- and office-bound urban France, with its tensions, sociologist Michel Crozier explains, "no one is truly at ease, and so the French *need* holidays more than, say, the Americans." Farmers, for whom leisure is still rare, put signs on routes through the countryside to the beaches saying "We, too, would like to see the sea."

A French professional may live nearly as well as his U.S. or West German counterpart, and better than a Briton. A British doctor who visited a colleague in Lyon was amazed. With two sons in private schools (a burden that few French parents inflict on themselves), the Briton rarely took a foreign holiday, had an old Cortina, had no household help, and could buy a new suit once every two years at best. Of his French host, the doctor said, "He drove us around in his brand-new Citroën CX, his wife wore Yves St-Laurent, and a maid served us at dinner in their luxury flat overlooking Lyon where his drinks cabinet had six different malt whiskies. They seemed to think nothing of spending 400 francs a head *chez* Bocuse [a famed "new cuisine" restaurant], and were leaving the next month for two weeks in the Caribbean."

### Small Was Beautiful

Such affluence reflects a striking national comeback. The French lost much more prestige but far fewer lives in World War II than in World War I (202,000 versus 1.36 million). Yet the physical destruction was more widespread—during the 1940 German invasion, five years of occupation and Anglo-American bombing, and the Allies' drive from the Normandy beaches. By V-E Day 1945, railways were shattered; Le Havre, Brest, and other Atlantic ports were devastated, as were many northern towns and factories. But what the French really had to face were the effects of a far longer decline.

During the 18th century, France became the strongest power in the Western world. Royalty stippled the Loire River valley with chateaux; Louis XIV (1643–1715), the Sun King, poured imperial treasure into Versailles. In 1810 the French, numbering 30 million, were the most populous European nation, bigger than what is now West Germany (22 million) and far ahead of the British (16 million). But by then the slide had begun.

A monarchy bankrupted by extravagance and by wars with England and Spain fell before the 1789 French Revolution.

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Thereafter, vast sums were expended on the Napoleonic Wars and other adventures. More funds were lavished on Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and other ornaments of a worldwide empire that never equaled that of the British and never returned much profit. At home, cherishing small towns, small farms, and small family businesses, the French failed to match the massive industrialization of Britain and Germany. By the 1920s and '30s, France had become a cheap, pleasant country to visit, a mecca for American artists and Lost Generation writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald. It was not such a happy place for the French, especially the poorer ones. By the 1930s, its industrial production was falling.

### **Monnet's Motto**

So was its population. Partly because of the Napoleonic law of equal inheritance, big families fell out of fashion. The French were outnumbered by the Germans and the British by 1910. Then came World War I, corrosive inflation, and the Great Depression. By 1935, France was counting only seven births for every eight deaths. By 1940, Nazi Germany had twice as many men of military age. Marshal Philippe Pétain ticked off the reasons for France's quick capitulation: "Too few allies, too few weapons, too few babies."

At war's end, the situation was gloomy. During 1944, when de Gaulle, the leader of the Free French, arrived from London to lead a provisional government, 10,000 or more Nazi sympathizers were shot by Resistance bands. "Peace" brought strikes, trials of 125,000 accused collaborators, and the emergence of the rigidly Stalinist Communists as the best organized of the French parties. Unable to reign in the Left, de Gaulle resigned in 1946. France's 14th constitution, partly written by the Communists and Socialists, led to the fractious Fourth Republic and what de Gaulle would call "the dance of the parties." France drifted into futile wars against Communist-led insurgents in Indochina and Muslim rebels in Algeria that would drain the country until 1962.

Political decline did not end until de Gaulle returned to power in 1958. But the economic recovery had begun much earlier and was well under way by the mid-1950s. What caused the remarkable postwar resurgence? Studying it in 1967, Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Charles P. Kindleberger rejected purely materialistic explanations. The rebound after 1945, he concluded, was basically "due to the restaffing of the economy with new men and to new attitudes."

The political stability of the de Gaulle era (1958-69) played a key role. But some of the recovery, ironically, can be traced



*A customer chatting with a clerk at a small food stand called an étalage in 1964. By now, French shoppers have grown accustomed to packaged foods, and to the supermarkets in which 60 percent of them are sold.*

back to the German Occupation. The Pétain regime attacked the “too few babies” problem with a system of Family Allowances designed to encourage childbearing. These, and what demographer Alfred Sauvy has called “a collective conscience,” a national survival instinct triggered by the shock of the defeat and the Occupation, lifted the birth rate. After the war, both morale and population began to climb. *Le bébé-boom* would supply the young workers needed by expanding industries.

Thoughtful Frenchmen used the Occupation to ponder the future. Plans to renovate the economy were framed by *Résistants* in France and Free French émigrés in Britain, the United States, and other havens. A key group formed in Washington around Jean Monnet, a stubborn idealist who first observed foreign business practices as a salesman for his family’s brandy firm in Cognac. He plotted how to bring France up towards U.S. levels, by non-U.S. methods, and won de Gaulle over to his ideas at a 1945 Washington meeting. The Plan, as Monnet’s blueprint was called, had a motto: “Modernization or downfall.”

But how? America’s postwar boom, assisted by low interest rates and other federal pump-priming measures, was driven by pent-up demand for autos, houses, schools, highways, and goods and services of all kinds. Japan would flourish by channeling its industrial energies toward turning new technology into products

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that would find markets worldwide. In West Germany, private business, working in a "structured" free market environment, would create an economic miracle through an export drive whose emblem would be the ubiquitous Volkswagen bug.

The French would need a somewhat different route to prosperity. True, they were hard-working, like the Japanese and the Germans. And they too would benefit from U.S. aid; they received about \$2.5 billion of the more than \$12 billion in Marshall Plan dollars that began to flow to Western Europe during 1948. Yet most of their industry was still weak, out-of-date, and too small in scale. This had to be changed—and would be, by bold decisions during the 1940s and '50s not just to foster industrialization but to force it, by joining West Germany in creating the European Economic Community. The Plan led to a state-directed *économie concertée* unique to France (see box, pages 56–57). It, in turn, transformed a family-enterprise economy into one of big firms capable of creating jobs and export income. Sales of French Renaults, Peugeots, Citroëns, and other cars to Germany would explode from a mere 11,000 in 1958 to 292,000 by 1977.

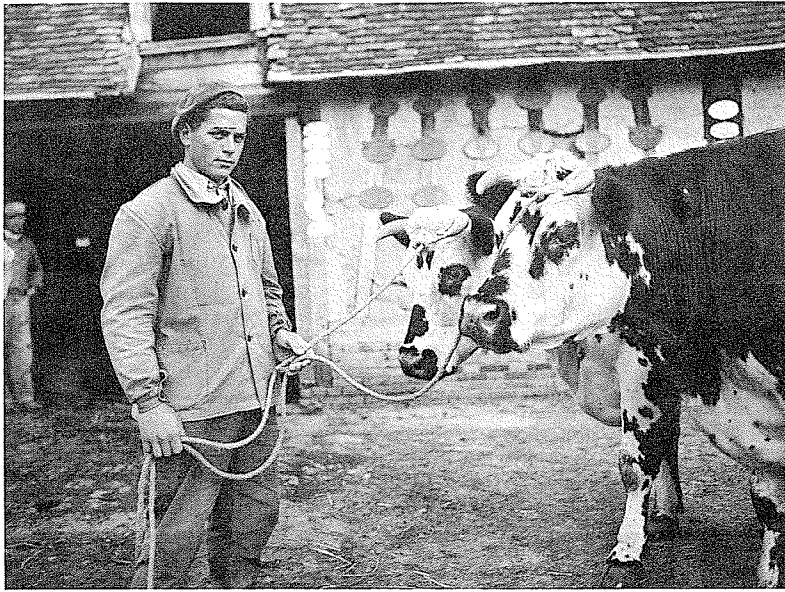
Perhaps the largest change in France since the war is reflected in one statistic. The share of the work force involved in farming has fallen to eight percent, still well above the 3.5 percent U.S. level but far below France's 35 percent of 1939. In what used to be called "the French desert," the provinces beyond Paris and the few other large cities, the old-style *paysan*, semiliterate and living little better than his animals, is disappearing.

### Sixty Acres, 320 Sows

As World War II ended, the typical farm outside the big grain and cattle operations of the Paris basin and the northeast plains was small, poor, and backward. Only 25 percent had running water, and plows were pulled by horses. The Plan required modernization, and by 1954 some 230,000 tractors were deployed. "Surplus" peasants had to find new work in town; nearly six million would move off the land by the 1980s. Farms grew (the current average: 70 acres), and farmers' techniques improved. Productivity per farmhand has risen sixfold since the war. France now leads the Common Market in farm output.\*

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\*A mixed blessing. Starting out with the lowest prices in the Common Market, French farmers benefited from rising sales to their neighbors. But the Common Agricultural Plan, a system of price supports and subsidies, encouraged other farmers to produce more, too. Result: huge surpluses. Wheat is in oversupply, thanks to the abundance of France's large northern farms. France turns out 24 percent more butter than it can use; West Germany more than twice as much milk; Denmark more than four times as much cheese. The surpluses, which are either stored away or "dumped" abroad, cost consumers dearly. Not only are high taxes required to pay for the farm subsidies, but Common Market food prices are nearly twice average world levels.



*A French Basque dairyman. France's farmers rank third among the world's producers of milk, fourth in meat and barley, seventh in cereals.*

"New attitudes," à la Kindleberger, played a role. During the 1950s, France's deeply conservative older farmers, fearing that Paris officials wanted to wipe them out, burned crops and otherwise rebelled at government efforts to raise efficiency. The rural reformation was saved by younger *paysans* who had spent the Occupation pondering how to save the family farm. On their own, Michel Debatisse and other leaders of the Christian Farmers Movement, a group originally formed to combat rural atheism, dispatched emissaries to learn about techniques used in places as varied as Denmark and Kansas. They toured France to build political support for drastic measures, including government pensions to nudge aging farmers into retirement and steps to encourage younger ones to engage in joint marketing of crops.

And family farming survived. Jean Pierre Le Verge, a 39-year-old Breton, grew up with five siblings on a rundown farm with 27 acres, five cows, a wood stove for heat, and only a horse cart for transportation. He and his brothers persuaded their father to retire during the 1960s. Using loans, an anathema to older farmers, they expanded to 60 acres and built a modern piggery with 320 sows. "We felt like real revolutionaries," Le Verge says. Today, with a modern house, a Peugeot, and an income of some 140,000 francs (\$17,000), he says, "we live like town people."



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Another change: Small tradesmen, 943,000 strong in 1954, are fading. The shopkeeper is going the way of the peasant.

For half a century, family-run *épiceries* (grocer's shops), butcher shops, and other small purveyors brought charm to French streets, and pain to French shoppers and politicians. They had long connived to keep hours short and prices high, and by the end of World War II *les BOF*, stores selling *beurre, oeufs, et fromages* (butter, eggs, and cheese) came to be a generic term of contempt for a whole class of war profiteers. When a fiery grocer-demagogue named Pierre Poujade led their fight for state protection from new competition during the 1950s, he was too late.

### 'Pre-Cast Deserts'

In 1949, 29-year-old Edouard Leclerc began selling biscuits at 25 percent below the usual price in a barracks-like store near Brest. He prospered. The retailing revolution he thus launched has since led to, among other innovations, more than 4,800 supermarkets—of which some 400 are “hypermarkets” claimed to be larger than any of their U.S. progenitors. Outside Marseille and Fontainebleau, the big Carrefour chain operates garish 22,000-square-foot monsters surrounded by vast *parking* and boasting as many as 70 checkout counters. *Les BOF* still have muscle: Pressure from shopowners led to a 1973 law requiring firms wanting to open large stores to win the approval of special local committees in the towns concerned. But increasingly, in Paris and elsewhere, small shops are run as “convenience stores” by energetic North Africans willing to stay open for the long hours that the old *petit épicié* would not endure.

Like its shopping, France's style of housing has changed.

The French emerged from the war with the worst accommodations in Western Europe. As late as 1954 more than 40 percent of their homes had no running water, 73 percent lacked indoor flush toilets, and 90 percent were without bath or shower.

During World War I, rents were frozen to protect soldiers' families from profiteering landlords. The law was never repealed, new construction lagged, and the housing stock deteriorated.

During the 1950s, the government dropped some rent controls and began pumping money into construction. In 25 years, more than one-half of the population has been moved into “new towns” and housing blocks that ring every city. Today, only eight percent of French homes (versus 2.2 percent in America) lack indoor plumbing. Newlyweds from poor families, who once lived with parents for years, now get their own flats right away.

Yet the French, as fond of having their own homes as Ameri-

### 'DIRIGISME': THE STATE AS ECONOMIC NANNY

One index of France's transformation since World War II has been the rise of big firms. When *Fortune* ranked the world's 64 largest companies in 1964, no French names appeared. Now, seven of the top 64 (and nine of the top 100) are French, led by Elf-Aquitaine and Compagnie Française des Pétroles, the state-owned oil giants, and state-run Renault and privately held Peugeot-Citroën.

Some French firms have turned around what was once called *le défi américain* (the American challenge). Peugeot has taken over Chrysler (Europe) and Renault controls American Motors. Elf-Aquitaine, having blocked domination of the French oil market by the American, British, and Dutch Seven Sisters, owns a stake in Montana coal. The St. Gobain conglomerate (glass, engineering) has plants in 16 countries.

Other sources of French pride are state undertakings such as France's nuclear power program (42 reactors in service); Aerospatiale, head of the six-nation group building the Airbus (ordered by 37 airlines); and the 10-nation, French-run Ariane rocket project. France's space effort sputtered after its 1960 start by Charles de Gaulle, but the first Ariane launch (1979) was a success. Having "smashed the American-Soviet monopoly," as a French scientist says, France aims to make money launching satellites.

France is either blessed or cursed with a high degree of state control. It has the most broadly nationalized Western European economy outside Austria, thanks to President François Mitterrand's Socialists; in 1982 they brought under state ownership: 22 of the largest remaining private French banks and financial institutions; five of 36 major industrial groups remaining in private hands (including chemicals, aluminum, and electronics); and controlling interests in Matra (missiles) and Dassault-Breuguet (aircraft). The state-owned share of industrial capacity rose from 18 percent to 32 percent, above even Britain's 30 percent.

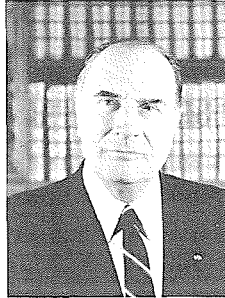
These were France's first big nationalizations since railroads, the Bank of France, and most arms manufacturers were taken over under the Popular Front regimes of the 1930s and Renault, Air France, electric and gas utilities, large insurers, and certain major banks were seized during the 1940s.

Yet the state's *dirigisme* (interventionism) goes beyond the management of national firms. The country's tradition of strong central authority dates back to Louis XIV; it is now maintained by a 2.6 million-member civil service bureaucracy directed from Paris.

Since World War II, *dirigisme* has taken many turns. Jean Monnet and the other brain trusters who launched the postwar recovery fashioned an *économie concertée* that combined state control with free enterprise. Working out of a Left Bank town house with a small staff (no more than 40), they carried out the Monnet Plan with few formal powers. Ignoring the political confusion of the Fourth Republic (22 governments in 12 years, 1946-58), they convened employers, union leaders, and bureaucrats in "modernization commissions" to set growth targets for everything from pig breeding to aluminum. They overrode *patrons* who feared the end of tariff protection that would come with the creation of the European Steel and Coal Community in 1951 and the Common Market in 1957. Coal and other key industries *were* made more efficient, though some specialists still

dismissed them during the 1950s as just an "enclave of modernization inside old France."

De Gaulle's great contributions were simple. Believing that "nothing effective and solid can be done without the renewal of the state," he established the stable Fifth Republic, with its popularly elected presidency. He also took theorist Jacques Rueff's advice to drive tariff barriers down quickly to force businesses to meet Common Market competition, and to devalue France's sagging currency (a slimmed-down New Franc appeared in 1960). France was soon inundated with Italian refrigerators and West German office furniture, but exports of its inexpensive cars and other items surged. Sales to Common Market nations tripled in four years. France's gold and currency reserves, all but gone in 1958, began to rise, reaching a value of 35 billion francs (\$7.1 billion) by 1968. Many service and construction jobs went begging, bringing thousands of "guest workers" from Portugal, Africa, and Asia.



Mitterrand

As the economy strengthened, de Gaulle de-emphasized the Monnet Plan and put "technocrats" in charge of key bureaucracies. *Dirigisme* increased. If a firm's executives wished, say, to raise the price of a widget, they had to get their competitors to join in preparing a dossier showing how costs and other factors had affected the widget trade. They then went to the Ministry of Finance in Paris, whose officials would decree a new price for *all* widgets. With no price competition, efficiency suffered.

By 1974, when the archetypal technocrat, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, became president, the global stagflation triggered by oil price rises slowed France's growth. Persuaded that France had to become a "specialized" high-technology economy, Giscard used his *dirigiste* powers to force the change. Price controls were stripped away to make French firms learn how to meet tough world competition. The state stopped shoring up many failing companies, notably in textiles and steel. (As the number of unemployed grew, Giscard's prime minister, economist Raymond Barre, said, "Let them start their own businesses.")

President Mitterrand has been of two minds on state control. As part of a decentralization plan, in 1982 the Paris-appointed prefects in France's 95 departments yielded much authority to local assemblies; local officials got a say in allocating state funds for the first time in 182 years. But Mitterrand also reinforced *dirigisme*; not only in his nationalizations but also in the austerity program (including a wage-price freeze) he imposed in 1982. That followed an attempt to spend France out of high unemployment that led only to deficits, double digit inflation, and Mitterrand's slump in the polls to a 32 percent approval rating, the lowest in Fifth Republic history.

For all of France's postwar economic success, West Germany has done better—with significantly less state intervention. Since Giscard's troubles during the 1970s, public faith in an omniscient state has eroded. "The Socialists tried to re-establish that myth, but it didn't work," says Bernard Rideau, a one-time Giscard adviser. "France is moving from the doctrinaire to the pragmatic. That could be the salvation of this country."

cans, have had to get used to apartment living. They speak of "sarcellitis," a disease with such symptoms as nervous breakdowns, juvenile delinquency, and wayward wives. Its name derives from Sarcelles, a pioneering project begun in 1956 near the Le Bourget airport outside Paris, today housing 40,000 in a grid-iron of gray, box-like, five- to 17-floor apartment blocks. Early residents of the place, which one columnist described as "a loveless, pre-cast concrete desert," had to travel long distances to work or even to shop. But the planners have learned. South of Paris at Evry, a new town housing 10,000 in cheerful, multi-colored flats has hypermarkets, three theaters, a skating rink, dance halls, and a library. Nearby factories furnish jobs.

For all of such improvements, inadequacies and anomalies abound. As late as 1978, 17 percent of French housing was still classed as "overcrowded," meaning, say, that a family of three or four was making do with three rooms. Wealthy Paris *bourgeois* may cling to elegant old flats in the 16th *arrondissement* whose still-controlled rent costs the tenants only five percent of their income; yet the average couple struggles to buy and then hang on to their new abode. France has few U.S.-style mortgage lenders,



*The 1968 strike began in Nanterre, a Paris University outpost where rebels like "Danny the Red" Cohn-Bendit (center) protested impersonal mass education. France's 23 universities were later divided into 76 "new" ones.*

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and not until the late 1960s did officials get around to devising a loan system that would allow young people with scant capital to buy a house; even then, they typically must come up with about 20 percent or more of the price on their own.

Despite the material improvements in French life since the 1940s, by the 1960s doubts about the moral and spiritual effects of progress were appearing. Film-maker Jean-Luc Godard, the son of a doctor, described his wry works as "reports on the state of the nation," and the bulletins were grim. His 1965 sci-fi satire, *Alphaville*, shot around computer centers and modern buildings, including those at Sarcelles, dealt with a grim city ruled by technocratic planners. *Weekend* prophesied a prospering society disintegrating into a kind of cannibalism, symbolized by the weekly highway carnage caused by Parisians grimly driving off at high speed to enjoy their unwonted leisure in the country.

*Weekend* appeared in the watershed year of 1968. That May, Paris *lycéens* (high school students) rebelled against a rigid educational system that, as they saw it, made their schools "just pedagogic factories." The uprising spread to *lycées* elsewhere and to France's swollen universities, whose enrollment, then 563,000, had grown sevenfold in 35 years. Soon, nine million workers with various grievances walked off their jobs, and plants and offices all over France were "occupied," in some cases by white-collar cadres. The unrest continued for about three months, and the government was shaken. De Gaulle's education minister promised more "dialogue" in the schools. The general, who was deeply wounded by the strife in the nation he always viewed as "the princess in the fairy tales" and would soon retire to his small manor house at Colombey Les-Deux-Eglises, spoke vaguely of a need for employee "participation" in management.

### A 'Blocked Society'

Although the 1968 upheaval did not bring a new dawn, the new shifts in housing have done something to blur France's class lines—those dividing the *bourgeoisie* (the propertied, or at least affluent, middle class) from the *ouvriers* (workers), the *citadin* (townsman) from the *paysan*. The families of a skilled worker and a minor government *fonctionnaire* (clerk, postal worker, primary school teacher) can nowadays often be found residing in the same modern apartment block. A worker may own the same car as a *bourgeois*, and off-duty he may dress similarly; the new generation of factory hands has given up the old uniform of cloth caps and dark jackets.

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Even so, France's class structure remains one of the most rigid in Western Europe. In Britain, the shoulder-to-shoulder experience of World War II led to increased social mobility. In France, which largely sat out the struggle, this did not happen, and prosperity has not helped break down class barriers either. Academics speak of *la société bloquée*, the "blocked society." By 1979, Michel Crozier was complaining that France was more than ever a nation "whose citizens are passionately attached to the distinctions and privileges which separate them."

### The Spreading Middle

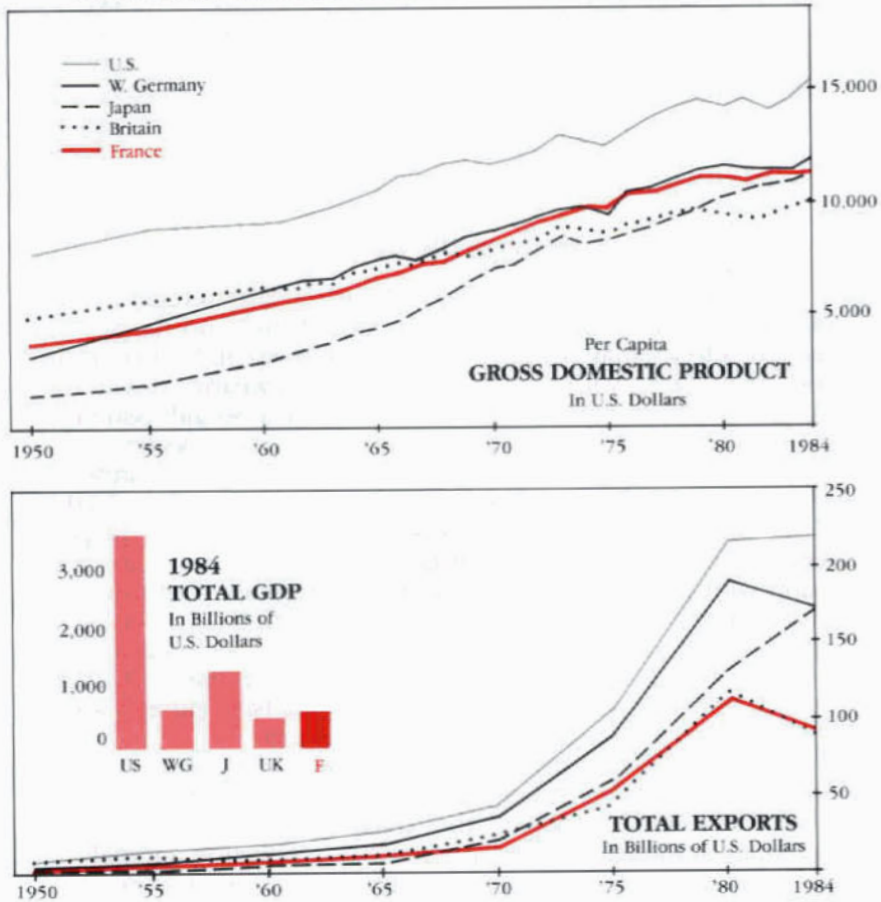
According to one survey, of the 2,500 most famous or powerful people in France today, only three percent came from working backgrounds. Under a 1977 reform, the junior classes of all private *lycées* were abolished, so children from both prosperous and poor families now mix in the same state schools until age 15. The hope was that more of the poor would then move on to universities and the *grandes écoles*, the 100 or so elite colleges that have traditionally produced future leaders in business, the bureaucracy, and the professions. Yet so far that has not happened. The proportion of university students from wage-earning homes was only nine percent in 1979, and may have fallen since.

A Julien Sorel, the poor youth who fought his way to power in Stendhal's 1830 novel, *The Red and the Black*, is still rare. An autoworker's son may become a white-collar, lower-middle class *petit bourgeois* by training to be a teacher, but he will rarely aspire to be an engineer or a doctor. For a family to change its place in the social pecking order takes at least two or three generations. A man's accent will not give him away so quickly as in Britain, but his background clings to him more closely.

Change does occur, however. The *paysan-citadin* distinction faded as the farmer began to live more like the auto dealer or insurance agent in town. And while the wall between *ouvrier* and *bourgeois* remains high, the French middle class is spreading.

The upper-middle class remains in the hands of the propertied *grande bourgeoisie* (de Gaulle was an example) and, just below, the *bonne bourgeoisie* (the home of Mitterrand, a lawyer and the son of a businessman). But further down is a growing middle-middle class. It embraces newly affluent sales and advertising executives, middle managers in modern firms, even storekeepers who have moved with the times. In one town I attended a lavish party thrown by a master butcher. Twenty years ago he had a small shop; now he owns a chain of big ones and lives in *nouveau-riche* style in a country house with a pool.

## KEEPING UP: The French and Other Economies, 1950-1984



Though France has long been known for wide divisions in both wealth and opportunity, efforts actually to measure the gulf have been rare and statistically shaky at best. The last try by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in 1976, suggested that the top 10 percent of Frenchmen commanded some 30 percent of all take-home income, while the bottom 10 percent got under two percent. As property owners, France's richest one percent held 26 percent of all wealth—well above the U.S. number, 18 percent, but under West Germany's 28 percent and Britain's 32 percent.

Whatever its real size, the "wealth gap" has long loomed large in politics. After the death of de Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, in 1974, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who had

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been de Gaulle's and Pompidou's finance minister, moved to narrow the gap. A modest capital gains tax was enacted, and there were boosts in pensions and the minimum wage, known by its acronym, SMIC. (At \$3.15 an hour, or not far under the U.S. minimum of \$3.35, a *smicard* who washes restaurant dishes 40 hours a week now enjoys some discretionary income.) France, Giscard said grandly, must become "an advanced liberal society."

### Helping the Helpful

How the wealth issue played in 1981 is hard to reckon. The 54 percent of the vote that gave Socialist Mitterrand the seven-year presidency may not have reflected enthusiasm for his promised "sharp break with capitalism" so much as weariness with the increasingly autocratic Giscard. In any case, the wealth issue has not been strong enough to arrest the Communists' decline.

Since the Party's peak just after the war, when it drew 25 percent of the vote, it has been overtaken by the Socialists. In the 1981 National Assembly elections, Communists pulled 16 percent of the vote to the Socialists' 36 percent. After a five-year union with the Socialists in a "common program" that it hoped would carry it to power, in 1977 the Party turned Left, aiming to keep its working-class support while making the Socialists appear to be moving to the political center. Then in 1981 the Party accepted Mitterrand's offer of posts in a Socialist regime; it was a cynical move that cost the Party much support.

The four Communists named to Mitterrand's Cabinet quit in 1984, to the Socialists' relief. Still strongly pro-Moscow—after the 1981 elections it endorsed the crackdown on the Solidarity movement in Poland—the Party remains a puzzling anomaly in democratic France. Communist mayors have long won re-election in many towns and cities (Le Havre, Le Mans, the "Red Belt" workers' suburbs of Paris). But in national elections, much of the Communist vote comes from people who merely wish to register dissatisfaction with the other choices.\* The core of the Party's support is the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), which claims 2.1 million members. It is the strongest of France's generally weak unions, which are organized on ideological lines rather than by craft or industry as in the United States.

After his election, Mitterrand not only further raised the

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\*This also explains some of the growth of the far-Right National Front. Its leader, ex-paratrooper Jean-Marie Le Pen, is a veteran of the failed fight against France's withdrawal from Algeria (from which 750,000 French settlers returned in 1962-63). His party blames France's ills on the four million immigrants, especially the North Africans among them, who came to France in the boom times. Last autumn polls showed the Front attracting 10 to 12 percent of the voters, about the same as the Communists.



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safety nets that Giscard had reinforced but took aim at those above. The Socialists imposed new taxes on expense accounts, yachts, and luxury hotels, and slapped a one-time 25 percent "supertax" on the 100,000 highest incomes. Then in 1982 they imposed an annual "wealth tax"; it rises to 1.5 percent on those households (numbering about 150,000) with property worth more than three million francs, or about \$370,000.\* After an outcry, Mitterrand got works of art exempted from the tax valuation, lest much of France's cultural heritage be sent abroad.

France was slower than some of her neighbors in framing a welfare state, but she has been catching up fast. Today various assistance programs amount to about 26 percent of the gross domestic product. (The U.S. level: 11.7 percent.) But unlike free-for-all programs elsewhere, France typically helps those who serve the state; they may or may not be those most in need.

### 10,000-Franc Children

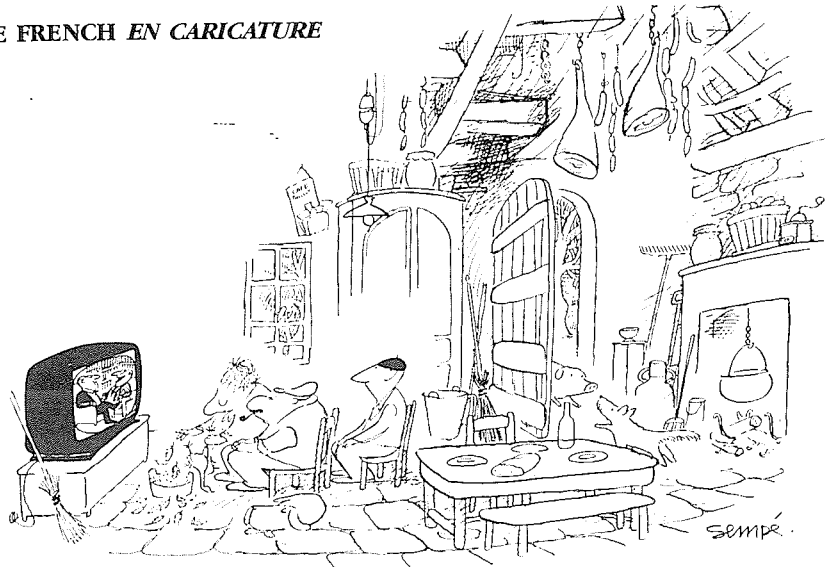
The dole is generous for the jobless who have been employed and paying social security taxes for some time but stingy with those who have not—such as young people and those who are handicapped or otherwise unable to work. The basic monthly pension for citizens over 65, at 1,200 francs (about \$150), is still no bonanza. On the other hand, the government spends heavily on a national health program that has turned a shortage of doctors and hospital beds into a surplus. It can point to good results: Infant mortality, once high, is down to about nine deaths per 1,000 births, lower than the U.S. rate and not far above Sweden's.

The central feature of French welfare remains the Family Allowance program. The French joke that a young married couple's first child is *biologique* and the subsequent ones are *économique*. The basic allowance, paid in the form of government checks mailed each month to eligible households, starts with the second child and rises with each additional *bébé*. A factory worker with a wife, three children, and a modest annual income of 50,000 francs (about \$6,200) draws at least 1,250 francs a month to help support his brood. If the mother chooses to stay home to keep house rather than get a job, she gets a generous annual grant. In 1980, the government introduced an additional lump-sum payment of 10,000 francs payable on the birth of each

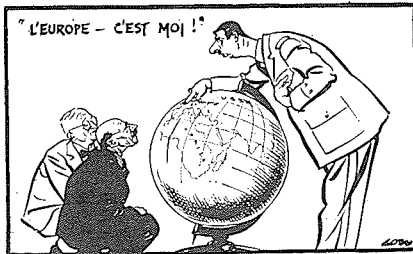
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\*The levy is an answer to that old French pastime, tax evasion. Earners of large incomes may declare only a small part, and take the chance that they will not be caught by understaffed tax authorities. (On average, wealthy folk are audited only every 20 years or so.) One result of the evasion is that wage earners, accounting for only 55 percent of all earned income, pay 84 percent of all income tax. Another is that the government raises 60 percent of its revenue from a less evadable "value added tax," a national sales levy that has long been under discussion in the United States.

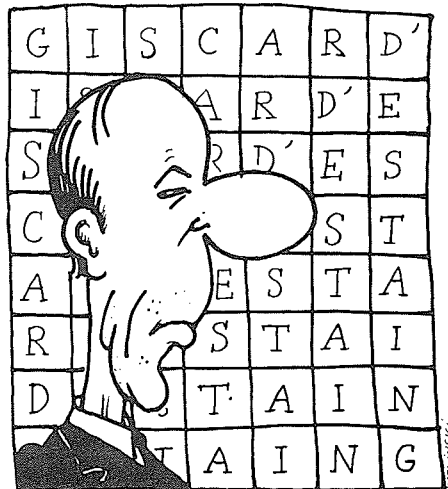
THE FRENCH EN CARICATURE



"And now, I'd like to pose a question to all our viewers. How does your own dream concept à la Kafka coexist with the irrational vision which you have of intrinsic existence?"



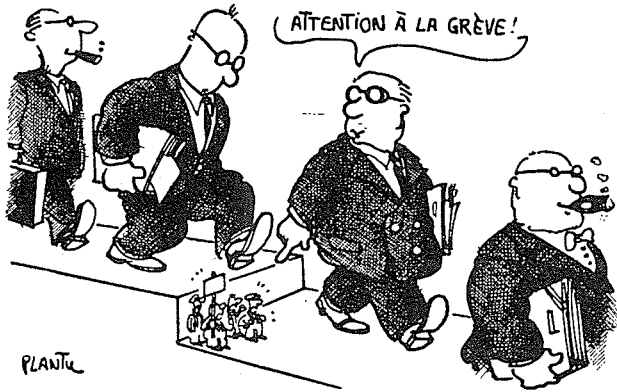
Charles de Gaulle giving a geography lesson to Harry S Truman and Britain's prime minister Clement R. Attlee after World War II.



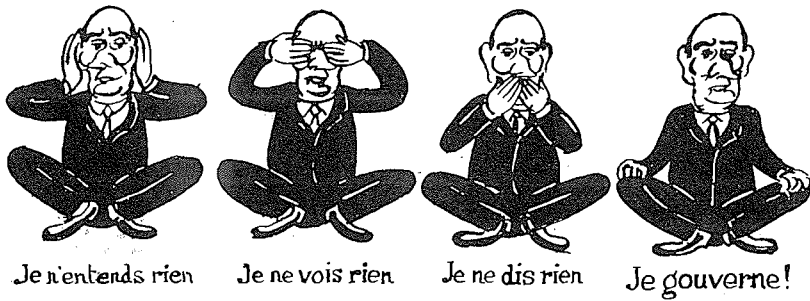
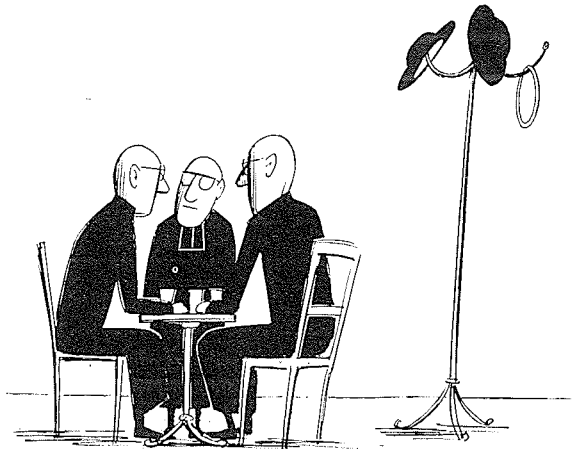
HORIZONTALEMENT. — CALAMITÉ — CONTRE-VERITÉ — CULPABILITÉ — CUPIDITÉ — DÉPITÉ — HÉRITÉ — MONDANITÉ — DISCRÉDITÉ — AUSTRÉITÉ — FÉODALITÉ — FÉROCITÉ — FISCALITÉ — DOMESTICITÉ — DUPLICITÉ — AVIDITÉ — AMBIGUÏTÉ — IMPLACABILITÉ — INSIPIDITÉ — EMBÊTE — IMPOPULARITÉ

VERTICALEMENT. — INANITÉ — MONDANITÉ — MÉDIOCRITÉ — INSÉCURITÉ — IRRITABILITÉ — VULGARITÉ — RAPACITÉ — TÉLÉGUIDÉ — PUTRIDITÉ — FATUITÉ — PERVERSITÉ — PRÉCIOSITÉ — VORACITÉ — CAUVITÉ — ÉSE-MATOSITÉ — EMPERLOUSE — DÉCAPITÉ — ENSANGLANTE — ENDIANTÉ

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing after his austerity program took hold during the late 1970s.



"Watch out for the strike!", a comment on union weakness.



François Mitterrand in 1985, as the Rainbow Warrior scandal grew.

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child after the second. Today, more than four million families benefit from these bonanzas, and over two million also receive housing subsidies, financed by a tax on employers. Such benefits add more than 50 percent to many breadwinners' take-home pay.

What Giscard called "the worst of all French social scourges," alcoholism, persists. While they drink almost 20 percent less than they did in 1951, the French remain the world's leading toppers. They consume an average of 13.3 liters of pure alcohol annually, well above America's 8.2 liters. Perhaps four million adult males drink more than the liter a day of red wine that doctors regard as safe for a manual worker. Deaths from cirrhosis of the liver, delirium, and polyneuritis run at some 21,000 a year. More than 37 percent of the men and 14 percent of the women in public hospitals are alcoholic cases; two-thirds of all mentally handicapped children are born of alcoholics.

Government efforts to wean people away from alcohol go back to the 1950s and have sparked riots in southern wine-producing areas. (Some four million people owe their livelihood to the grape.) Thirty years ago, I would see babes of two or three in cafés being given full glasses of wine by their parents. The law now forbids the serving of spirits to anyone under 18, but barmen rarely refuse a father who asks for *un rouge* for his adolescent son. The scourge is worst in Brittany and the Nord, where business is often transacted over a liter of *rouge* in a café. In one fishing port, a merchant navy doctor set up his surgery in a bistro, the better to serve his clientele.

### Remodeling the Boss

The French imbibe not so much through neurosis or unhappiness, like many Anglo-Saxons, as from ancestral habit. French alcoholism is linked to social backwardness in rural or slum areas. Among sophisticated city folk, it is uncommon. Thus there is hope that the rural exodus, more education, and rehousing (in new towns, the law allows no more than one bar per 3,000 residents) will curb the problem. Already many French are turning from cheap wine and cognac to less destructive potions. Since 1959, beer consumption has climbed by 70 percent.

Some of the large if subtle changes in French life have stemmed from the May 1968 upheaval. One casualty: the obedience to authority once so marked in France.

The 1968 strikes, which brought the occupation of factories and even the locking of bosses in their offices, marked the end of the autocratic French style of corporate command. The Patronat, the federation of most larger French employers, launched a "so-



*A wedding party of a generation ago. The family clan endures: One-half of younger adults live within 12.5 miles of their parents and visit often.*

cial marketing" effort to compete with the unions for the loyalty of employees. At many firms, the personnel manager, long an ignored junior executive, became a man with a large staff, equal in rank to the sales director. While German-style co-management remains taboo (the left-wing unions reject "collaboration with capitalism" in any case), "job enrichment" is in vogue.

At state-owned *Aérospatiale's* helicopter plant at Marignane, near Marseille, the time clock was eliminated. The 6,500 employees now arrange their 41.5-hour work week largely to suit themselves. Staffers work in semi-autonomous groups, à la Volvo and Fiat, and are free to slip off to a rest lounge for a few minutes without permission—most unusual in a French factory. Each light *Ecureuil* (Squirrel) helicopter is assembled by two or three workers who agree to a certain output and produce it in their own time. A boss "must be a committed social activist," says plant manager Fernand Carayon. "A *patron* [boss] who is not accepted by his staff as deserving that title is no true *patron*."

A small but vocal women's liberation movement emerged in France, as elsewhere, during the 1970s, but its influence remains minimal. This has been no great surprise. Few women paid much attention nearly four decades ago when Simone de Beauvoir lectured her female compatriots, in *The Second Sex* (1949), on escaping their "self-imposed inferiority."

French women are so unmilitant that they did not get around

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to winning the right to vote until the arrival of the Liberation Government under de Gaulle (not himself a noted feminist) in 1945. Prior to the 1964 Matrimonial Act, a wife had to obtain her husband's permission to open a bank account, run a shop, or get a passport; divorce courts were obliged to regard a wife's infidelity as more serious than a man's. It was only during the years of Giscard, who created the post of secretary of state for women's affairs, that the remaining statutory inequalities in matters of divorce, property, and right to employment were eliminated. Other measures legalized abortion and mandated a minimum 16 weeks' paid maternity leave for female workers.

That some of this has come late may be due to the latent machismo of a Latin society with Catholic traditions. But French women themselves have not shown much interest in erasing all gender distinctions. Socially, they have been rarely segregated or treated as inferior, as in some Mediterranean nations. They see themselves, and are seen, as the equals of men—equal, but different. This remains the land of *la petite différence*, not one of suffragettes, or of the women's club beloved of Anglo-Saxons.

### Fleeing the Nest

But since 1968, a kind of feminism has spread among younger women. They do not want to lead the *same* lives as men, but they do expect equality of legal rights and access to careers. Girls of good family no longer sit at home until marriage; they get a job. More than 46 percent of university students are women, up from 25 percent in 1930; 15 percent of the 150 students at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris, the prestigious post-graduate civil service school, are female.

Women make up 39.4 percent of the overall work force (close to the United States' 43 percent), and fully 34 percent of the younger doctors are female. But their overall representation in the professions is still only 23 percent, and politics remains a *phallogocracie*, as elsewhere. Only about five percent of the 485 winners of seats in the Chamber of Deputies in 1981 were women, but at that the Chamber is as female as the U.S. House of Representatives and slightly more so than Britain's House of Commons. Party leaders from Right to Left are wary of running women as candidates, fearing that they do not pull votes. Said Foreign Trade Minister Edith Cresson, one of the record six women in Mitterrand's 44-member Cabinet: "The convention persists that politics is a man's affair, for discussions in bistro or parliament. A woman who pushes herself forward is *mal vue*."

The national leadership remains confused about what



*The arrival of "Dallas" and "Dynasty" on French TV sparked debate about U.S. "cultural imperialism." Now France has its own steamy series: "Châteauvallon," about two rich families (above) in the Loire Valley.*

France wants from its women. Mitterrand named a Minister for Women's Rights, Yvette Roudy. But jobs are scarce and the birth rate remains a concern, so the government keeps raising its inducements to families to keep wives at home to raise children. Picturebooks in state primary schools still show men as bosses, women at a stove or cradle, or working as nurses or secretaries.

Change has come far more slowly in the world of jobs and careers than in private life. The old idea of France as a land of unfettered *amour* had always been a foreigner's fantasy. As late as the 1960s surveys showed unmarried French women as a whole, particularly in the provinces, to be among the most sexually unliberated in Europe, outside Italy and Spain. But, perhaps spurred by the Scandinavians' famed postwar tolerance, permissiveness has spread. "In general," says Dr. Pierre Simon, a leading sexologist, "sexual freedom in France has now reached the same level as in Britain, West Germany, or Sweden. That, for a so-called Catholic land, is quite a transformation."

Laws against contraception dating back to 1920, and intended to bolster the birth rate, were not repealed until 1967. Though acceptance of the Pill and other measures lagged for a

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while, polls show that 81 percent of women between 15 and 49 approve of them, and 68 percent use them.

Fewer couples are going to the altar. A recent Church-sponsored survey found that some 60 percent of people between 21 and 34 "do not think it worth going through any marriage ceremony." As the housing shortage eased, it became easier for a young unmarried couple to flee the parental nest to a small apartment of their own. Among middle-class youths, more than 50 percent of those who marry live together first.

### **Pagans, Dropouts, *Zipis***

Divorce never became the divisive issue that it was in Catholic Italy. (It was finally permitted there in 1970.) Having risen steadily since the war, the rate of family breakup in France increased sharply after 1975, when an easy form of divorce by mutual consent, similar to U.S. and British no-fault procedures, was adopted. Today, one marriage in four terminates in the courtrooms, and divorcées suffer little if any stigma. Many traditionalists have resented the image of loose adult living that has been fostered in fiction and films, from Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) to *Cousin Cousine* (1975). When, back in 1964, Godard filmed a satire about a modern Bovary titled *The Married Woman*, Gaullist censors sprang to the defense of French marital honor and made the director change *The* to *A*. But such puritanism would hardly be imaginable today.

The postwar shift away from older values is vividly reflected in the transformation of Catholicism. Although some 80 percent of all infants still receive Church baptism, Mass attendance is low; only 14 percent of all Catholics (10 percent of those in Paris) attend weekly services. The priesthood is short of recruits. More than in stronger Catholic countries such as Italy and Ireland, the Church has lost touch with its popular roots.

One cause has been the depopulation of the rural areas where the old ways persist. (In the Vendée, 230 miles southwest of Paris, 80 percent of Catholics attend Sunday Mass.) Then again, having remained an establishment bastion long after its legal separation from the state in 1905, the Church has veered in several directions since the war; by now it has come to seem less a pillar of society than a loose network of iconoclastic militants. It encompasses angry conservatives such as 80-year-old Monsignor Marcel Lefèbvre, who defies the Vatican by retaining the Latin Mass, "worker-priests" who take factory jobs to recruit left-wing believers, and others who preach and even practice sexual freedom. Surveys show that 86 percent of priests oppose celibacy; 84



percent never wear the cassock.

During the Occupation, a parish priest named Abbé Godin caused a stir with a book called *France, a Mission Country*; it argued that the nation was no longer Christian but essentially pagan. That thesis today seems just as tenable. Polls show that those who believe in God have dropped from 74 percent in 1968 to 65 percent; the decline has been sharpest among the young.

Indeed, French youths are something of an enigma. Docile during the 1950s and '60s, they seemed to explode during the events of 1968. Later than the young in Anglo-Saxon countries, they won freedom from parental authority. And thousands of students, young urban intellectuals, and *zipis* (hippies) trekked to rural utopias seeking a "purer" life in hill-farming and handicrafts. Most gave up, but others followed during the 1970s, when many young French discovered The Environment. Today some 10,000 self-styled *installés* (homesteaders) live in the Cévennes and the foothills of the Alps and Pyrénées.

But a year after the 1968 events, a study of 16- to 24-year olds suggested a generation that was generally content with the social order. And today sociologist Bernard Cathelat finds that about



A "mini-Brasilia." One of nine large new towns patterned on British and Swedish models and begun during the 1970s, Cergy-Pontoise, 20 miles northwest of Paris, will house 120,000, many of them in high-rises.

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one-half of French youths are "basically conformist," eager to settle into adult society; "they value the things of the past, they are not risk takers." A smaller group, perhaps 29 percent, are dropouts or quasi dropouts, mostly middle-class people with some education; "such people could well have stormed the barricades in '68, but today they believe in nothing." The least numerous category is "a lumpen-youth that has failed at school, and now has dreary jobs or none at all." They "find safety valves in motor-bikes, rock music, or minor delinquency."

### Vicious Circle

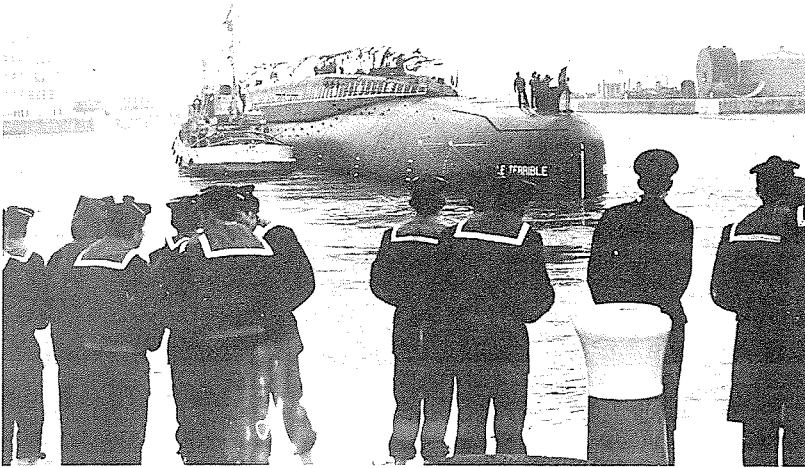
Juvenile crime appeared later in France than in other Western countries and was never widespread. Ditto drugs; not until 1969-70 did marijuana or hard drugs turn up in quantity, and the problem has not reached U.S. or West German proportions; at 100 to 150 a year, deaths from overdoses run at one-third of the German level. Those young men who do not win exemptions dutifully report for their 12 months of compulsory military service. But few share the passionate work ethic that drove their elders to build the new France. "Our parents live for work; we work so as to live better," a young technician told me. As sociologist Jean Duvignaud observed in *The Planet of the Young* (1975), modern youths "do not rebel, they retreat. Their great search is for a refuge against a society that they see as impersonal and unwelcoming."

As growth slowed during the 1970s, the word *crise* (crisis) was widely heard. In the boom years, the French came to expect ever larger cars, smarter flats, costlier holidays. Now they had to recognize that this kind of happiness could be fragile. By the 1980s, sociologists were noting a national *repli sur soi*, a withdrawal into privacy. There was new interest in family roots, regional languages, history. *Montaillou* (1975), Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie's look at life in a medieval village, was a best seller.

"The pendulum has been swinging back," suggests a leading social analyst, René Remond. "During the 1950s the French moved from the values of stability to those of growth and change. Now they are shifting back to stability." It is entirely possible to view the election of the Socialists in 1981 not as a vote for change but as a cry for at least a pause in all the progress the voters had had to absorb over the previous 30 years.

Despite that progress, much about French life remains the same—too much, many say. The state-citizen feuding that de Gaulle noted reflects a real issue: What price technocracy?

What the French call *l'étatisme*, the pervasive role of the



*Launching the missile sub Le Terrible (1970). Mitterrand is updating de Gaulle's nuclear force and backing U.S. cruise and Pershing II weapons for NATO. Soviet power, and West German pacifism, worry Paris.*

State, has roots in royalist history and was reinforced by Napoleon. Under the Fifth Republic, the State has remained strong, and the size and power of its governing elites have grown.

De Gaulle despised old-style career politicians. He promoted a breed of civil servants known as "technocrats," apostles of rational planning, and made several of them ministers in his government. Some of them belonged to the dozen or so Grands Corps d'Etat, the club-like organizations that operate in parallel with government ministries yet wield much influence beyond. One of the most venerated of the Grands Corps, the Inspection des Finances (IF), nominally exists to audit state accounts. In practice, it furnishes a pool of administrators who can move back and forth between high-paid state and industry posts.

Coming from a few schools—the most celebrated being the Ecole National d'Administration (ENA), set up in 1946, and the Ecole Polytechnique, a Napoleonic creation—these mandarins constitute a self-perpetuating ruling caste. By now, their realm is broad indeed, given not only the state's ownership of many businesses but also its role as France's chief investor and banker.

The Grands Corps system, which has no parallel in the United States or even in old-boy Britain, continued under Pompidou and Giscard (who came to the presidency with Ecole Polytechnique and ENA diplomas and IF membership in his dossier). Few dispute that the technocrats and the power they

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wielded were essential in such undertakings as the modernization of France's coal mines, the creation of national oil companies to compete with the Seven Sisters, and the nurturing of Aerospatiale and Europe's most ambitious nuclear energy program. But now that the French recovery has "matured," some critics are asking whether *l'étatisme* has become a liability.

In a 1976 best seller, *Le Mal Français*, Alain Peyrefitte, a longtime Gaullist minister, bewailed the "vicious circle" in French civic life. "A population at once passive and undisciplined," he wrote, justifies *l'étatisme* but also fosters "a bureaucracy which discourages initiative, suffocates activity, and manages to make citizens even more passive." Thus the French "move in one bound from lethargy to insurrection, while the State passes from pressure to oppression."

One manifestation of the state power-popular passivity syndrome was *l'affaire Greenpeace*, the uproar over the sinking by French agents of the nuclear test-protest ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland harbor last July. The French were not angry that the government had done the deed so much as they were amused that it had got caught. As one Paris journalist noted, the episode recalled the remark of Joseph Fouché, the French secret service chief, when Napoleon ordered the execution of the powerful Duc d'Anghein: It was "worse than a crime—it was a blunder."

Tales of bureaucratic insensitivity abound. When architects who were planning new public housing near Marseille wanted the main windows to face north and away from the heat of the Midi sun, it took them six months to win approval from their superiors in northerly Paris, where sunshine is prized. Then again, the individualistic French, while grouching about state supervision, show little talent for action on their own. Local citizens will sign petitions demanding government funds for, say, a crèche or a youth club. It will seldom occur to them, as it would to Americans or Britons, to raise the money and run the project themselves.

Progress in France has typically depended on the emergence of the rare individual leader, as was the case with both the young farmers and the upstart retailers of the 1950s and '60s. France "is full of exciting activity" in many areas, Michel Crozier has written. "But all the individual initiatives, all the innovations, stay halted at a certain level." It is a state of mind that neither the State nor the governed yet seem able to change.

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