



At this point in the Stevens campaign, it is the union's strategy to avoid risking a representation election, where the cards would be stacked in the company's favor, in favor of a strategy of legal action and public exposure. The confrontation at the stockholder's meeting is one example of the latter strategy.

## Stevens shifts stockholder meeting but workers won't be shut out

By Steve Hoffius

GREENVILLE, S. C.

**A**S CARS TURNED INTO THE driveway of Textile Hall here March 7 for the J.P. Stevens Co. annual meeting they were met by two lines of Stevens workers.

On one side about 15 workers—men and women, about half black and half white—held hand-painted signs. The signs called out support for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers union and criticized Stevens, the world's second largest textile firm, for its numerous violations of Occupational Safety and Health regulations and of Fair Labor practices.

On the other side stood about 30 women all wearing sweatshirts reading, "Stand up for Stevens." They smiled and waved their signs, some professionally made, to the stockholders who drove past. "We Like Our Jobs," said one woman's sign. Another held one that proclaimed, "Stevens Fair to Blacks," but everyone across the street jeered at that one. "How would you know?" someone shouted. The sweatshirt boosters were all white. An erect middle-aged man in a sport coat rushed over and encouraged the placard-bearer to put it down.

Soon the union supporters opposite the sweatshirt brigade began to drift away, toward the Textile Hall. They were definitely not satisfied, and they were not content to stand outside in the chilly March wind, waving signs at passing cars. They entered the meeting, proxy statements in hand, to



Pro-Stevens workers demonstrate wearing "Stand up for Stevens" T-shirts.

confront—most for the first time—the company directors.

Inside the hall about 800 people gathered, nearly a third of them union members and supporters. Almost all the men—supporters and critics of the company alike—wore somber sportcoats and ties. The women wore colorful dresses or stylish pantsuits. The crowd could have been confused for a church group, if not for the many pins announcing, "Cotton dust kills." And few church groups are as integrated as the union backers.

### Change in meeting place.

Less than two weeks before, officials of the beleaguered textile giant had an-

nounced that for the first time in history the annual meeting would be held in the South, where almost all their plants are located. They had decided, rather hurriedly, that the Board of Directors and stockholders should see a textile mill from the inside, and the meeting place was shifted from New York to Greenville.

Union members and supporters had to shift their plans as well, plans that had called for a repeat of last year's much-publicized demonstrations. Outside the meeting last year Coretta Scott King led a sizeable crowd of marchers, and inside, angry charges were exchanged and a surprisingly large vote supported resolutions critical of the company's practices. National media recorded it all.

Despite the sudden move south, hundreds of people gathered in Greenville to voice their complaints with the company. They included men and women from J.P. Stevens plants around the South, workers who had recently retired or had been fired for union activities, and brown lung victims.

The night before, at a Greenville motel, they held a Rally for Human Rights, presenting a detailed report of Stevens law violations and harassment of workers sympathetic to the union.

At the annual meeting the workers and their supporters approached the microphones one by one to repeat their statements of the night before, this time directly to their bosses. They announced, often slowly and haltingly, their names and hometowns. They came from Montgomery, Ala., from Atlanta and Statesboro, Ga., from Rock Hill and Greenville, S.C., from Roanoke Rapids and Aberdeen, N.C. They stood patiently in line for Board Chairman James Finley to recognize them, and they tried to suggest to the Board something of their lives.

One white man with long black hair combed back on his head explained, "Mr. Finley, I'm one of the highest paid at the plant where I work, I've worked there 18

years and I only make \$4.44 an hour. Others make even less. Now, I'm as good at my job as you are at yours, and I'd like a little more money." Finley, who draws an annual salary and bonuses of more than \$350,000 went on to the next question.

A tall black man from Montgomery, Ala., announced, "I've been discriminated against in so many ways. Most of all, I was fired a while back for my union activities. Mr. Finley, if you are to turn over a new leaf, will you please put us back in our jobs? Today?"

### No particular rules.

From his raised podium Finley rotated his glance around the room, calling on various speakers, leaving them when he felt they had said enough, cutting and turning on microphones as he chose.

"Shareholder meetings," he explained, "are not run by any particular set of rules, but in a fair and impartial way." Which meant that when an embarrassing question arose, he simply said, "The company would not be benefited by a discussion of that," and called on someone else.

For a while the workers seemed almost shy when they found themselves facing the company chief executive. "Mr. Finley, we have a cement floor in Montgomery," said one thin, well-dressed black worker. He addressed the director slowly, as if the wrong word might get him evicted. "Now that's fine for me and the other young workers. But I'm getting older, not younger. It's much harder on us than a wooden floor would be." Finley brushed him aside and suggested that he talk with his plant supervisor. The man agreed. "Thank you, Mr. Finley," he said. "I will request to talk with my supervisor."

That diffidence didn't last long. Finley refused to respond to many questions, hurrying people along if bored by their statements. Repeatedly, Finley cried out, "You want an election, let's have an elec-

Photos/Rosette Coryell

## FRANCE

# Communists score pyrrhic victory in French vote

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

**G**EOERGE MARCHAIS SCORED a pyrrhic victory over Francois Mitterrand in the first round of the two-round French parliamentary elections on March 12. By its aggressive campaign against its left-wing partners, Marchais' Communist party (PCF) succeeded in preventing the Socialist party (PS) from gaining a stature that would have dwarfed the PCF. In the process, it risked taking the blame for turning the left's historic opportunity for victory into another defeat.

The outcome of the first round was a bitter surprise to the Socialists, who won only 22.5 percent of the total national vote, compared to the 26 percent to 28 percent indicated by various polls. The PS neither attained the seven million votes predicted by Mitterrand nor came out as "France's top party," as he claimed a touch too hastily while the ballots were still being counted. That distinction went to the most right-wing of the four major parties, Jacques Chirac's Gaullist *Rassemblement pour la Republique* (RPR), with 22.6 percent.

The PCF's own 20.5 percent was less than the 21.5 percent scored by the Union for French Democracy (UDF), hastily pulled together by three center-right parties supporting President Valery Giscard d'Estaing towards the end of the campaign. In short, the two big parties on the right did better than the two big ones on the left. Counting the 2.1 percent of its third partner, the Left Radical Movement (MRG), the Union of the Left got a total

and quickly concluded an agreement for the March 19 second round.

The agreement to pick up the common program where it had been dropped last September fell far short of what the PCF had been claiming was indispensable. It left completely up in the air the key issue of which affiliates were to be included in nationalization of major industry. With the PS cut down to size, Marchais could afford to accept Mitterrand's oft-denounced "artistic fuzziness," confident that if the left miraculously won on March 19, the PCF was in a relatively strong bargaining position. Marchais' immediate political task was to avoid blame for a probable left-wing defeat.

The brewing bitterness against the PCF's divisive campaign strategy could be glimpsed in a front-page comment by *Le Monde's* editor-in-chief Jacques Fauvet, a Mitterrand supporter, who elegantly hinted that he might be coming around to the "hand of Moscow" hypothesis to explain a Communist electoral strategy "that accepted the risk of defeat." Only time would tell to what extent the PCF was motivated by a desire not to "destabilize" western Europe and strengthen opposition to detente by taking part in the French government, Fauvet suggested.

## Party system encourages strife.

However, assuming it was motivated by the simplest electoral self-interest, the PCF was led to campaign against the Socialists through the first round by the very rules of the electoral game laid down by De Gaulle's fifth republic constitution, which abolished proportional representation of parties in the national assembly and substituted the current two-round



Above: Communist candidate Jean Ellenstein greets the voters in Paris campaign. Left: A Hitler moustache is drawn on Gaullist party candidate on poster in Paris.

big parties on the left and two big parties on the right, alternately quarrelsome and united, is shaped by the country's political mechanisms. It is a mystification to try to read this pattern as a reflection of public opinion. It reflects the desires and aspirations of the population only in a distant and distorted way, like most such formal political mechanisms.

With no hope of picking up votes in the center, the PCF fought to preserve its traditional working class constituency from possible PS inroads by a vigorous "poor people's" campaign. The socialists have argued plausibly that only a left heavily weighted in their favor could overcome "the red scare" enough to win the runoff. But the PCF could hardly be expected to play dead for the sake of Mitterrand's career.

## Left abstention?

How does the PCF campaign, aggressive in tone but essentially defensive, account for the socialists' poor showing? Since the PCF itself fell back slightly from its 1973 score, while the PS advanced (although less than expected), potential socialist votes seem to have strayed elsewhere than into the Communist totals.

The most ready hypothesis was that middle-of-the-road voters were scared away from the PS by turbulence on the left that suggests incapacity to govern. But what sort of socialism would such people have supported? If the PS lost these votes, that may just mean a serious misunderstanding has been avoided.

Another possibility is that potential left-wing voters account for many of the 16.6 percent who abstained. The "red scare" may have brought out nearly the full right-wing vote. But a lot of people on the left, especially of libertarian bent, suspicious of electoral politics to begin with, were turned off by the campaign. It was perhaps not so much the quarrel on the left that alienated people as its staged quality. Marchais' attacks on the Socialists seemed contrived. But they struck home. That is how they managed to hurt both the PS and the PCF.

The Communist campaign played heavily on traditional French working class fears of a "socialist sell-out." Probably with an eye on the surprisingly good showing in last year's municipal elections by Trotskyist candidates in a number of working class districts, Marchais unabashedly went after the "Gauchiste" vote with the most resolutely working-class line the PCF has espoused for some

time. Marchais warned that Mitterrand was ready to sell out the workers, and urged a big PCF vote to prevent this. Along came Trotskyist Arlette Laguiller, who warned that both Mitterrand and Marchais would sell out the workers, and urged a big vote for Lutte Ouvriere.

Some free thinkers surely decided they were both right, and didn't vote at all. The PCF may have done better at inspiring distrust of the Socialists than at inspiring confidence in itself. This is indicated by returns from the industrial suburbs of Paris, the traditional "red belt." In a large number of its main strongholds, such as Saint-Denis, Clichy, Nanterre, Issy, Saint-Ouen, Bagnolet, Bobigny, Montreuil, Ivry and Choisy-le-Roi, the PCF scored less than it had in 1973.

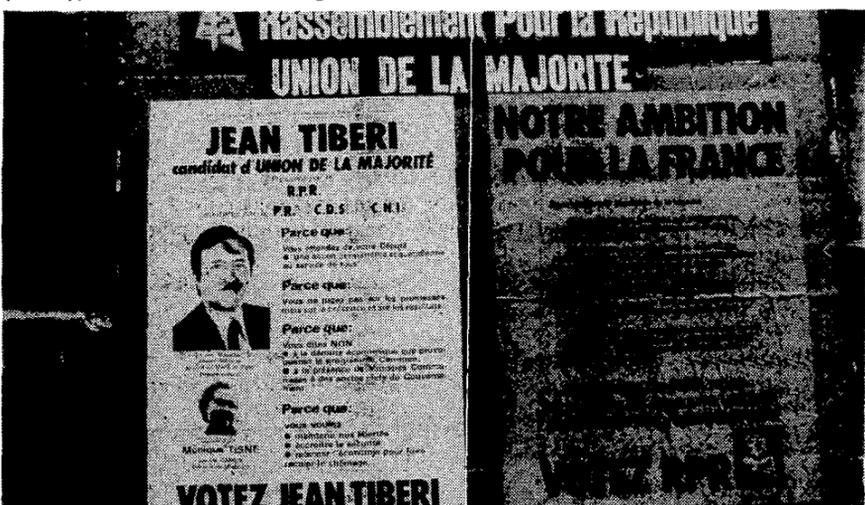
This hypothesis offered a faint hope that the left, re-united at the last moment, might yet manage to squeak through in the runoff by luring back working class voters who sat out the first round. It was a slim hope that at best could provide only a slim victory.

## Mitterrand a loser.

The big loser in the first round was Francois Mitterrand. His strategy was to rise above specific issues, lifted by "the biggest party in France" and his own image of serene statesmanship, able to weather Communist nagging, sustained by a vision. He played it well, but he was decisively upstaged by Marchais, whose rambunctious television performances left the impression that the PCF leader could undo anybody's serenity.

Mitterrand's leadership of the PS is likely to be challenged, sooner rather than later. Ambitious younger men such as Michel Rocard are eyeing the succession. And the left-wing CERES minority now say that its more issue-oriented approach would have parried the PCF attacks more effectively than the cult of the Mitterrand personality.

The vote, with its two-versus-two symmetry, foreshadowed the paralysis of rigidly balanced oppositions more than the change so many claimed to seek. Any government will be reminded constantly that half the country is against it. And the long, drawn-out campaign has overexposed all party leaders, sapping their credibility. The French have had an overdose of electoral politics. The next scheduled parliamentary elections are five years away. Movement for social change can now be expected to move to other levels, perhaps explosively. ■



of 45.1 percent. The far left got 3.3 percent.

The left could claim a percentage victory in the first round only by an optimistic interpretation of the vote scattered between a mass of protest candidates, some of whom—notably the ecologists and feminists—refused to be labeled left or right. But if it was reasonable to conclude that a majority of voters had rejected the right, it was not clear that they were ready to embrace the left. The vote showed France split down the middle, with no clear majority on either side.

## Partnership resumed.

Back in January, Marchais had said the PCF would have to do better than its 1973 showing of 21 percent in order to resume partnership with the PS. But the day after the first round, he hightailed over to the PS headquarters with his 20.5 percent

district-by-district method of electing deputies. This was designed to move France away from a multi-party parliamentary system towards a more American-style setup with a strong presidency and something approaching a two-party system.

Unless, like the MRG, they can make deals with larger parties on the basis of pockets of local vote-getting ability, small parties tend to get knocked out in the first round. It takes 12.5 percent in the first round to qualify for the second.

The first round was meant to be a rough equivalent of the American party primary. The system encourages the bigger parties to make deals with each other for the second round runoff, and to campaign against their potential partner in the first in order to be in the strongest possible position in making those deals.

The pattern that has emerged of two