

# Opinion/Commentary/Letters

## French industries face nationalization

By JACQUELINE GRAPIN  
PARIS — The prospect that a coalition of Socialists and Communists may come to power in France in early 1978 has already stimulated discussion here about the possibility that some French firms, now in private hands, may be taken over by the government.

Such a discussion might provoke outcries of alarm were it being held in the United States, where the free enterprise system is deeply entrenched. But here in France, the debate is going on in an atmosphere of relative equanimity.

One reason for this lack of passion

is that the Socialists and Communists, who intend to establish a common front in the legislative elections due to take place 15 months from now, are themselves divided on the issue.

Secondly, the French know from experience that government takeovers do not automatically spell disaster, since many state-owned companies have generally been performing efficiently under skilled directors.

A key question being raised, however, is whether further nationalization will reduce the competitive factor in France's business

world, since public corporations enjoy certain tax and other advantages that give them an edge over private firms.

Another important question under consideration is whether, with a leftist government in charge, state-owned companies will be permitted to function independently as profit-making firms — or whether they will be compelled to tailor their activities to national planning policies that may be unrealistic.

Although the likelihood of a leftist victory is some distance away, talk of nationalization is currently being spurred by the scandal implicating the famous French aircraft firm of Marcel Dassault, which has come under investigation for allegedly bribing high government officials. The case promises to become France's equivalent of the Lockheed affair.

It is plausible to expect that Dassault, whose heirs are engaged in other lines of work, may turn over his company to the present conservative government in exchange for substantial compensation rather than risk a settlement with a less sympathetic leftist coalition. But if this occurs, it could accelerate the trend toward nationalization.

The Socialists and Communists have already drawn up a list of ten broad business groups that they intend to nationalize. These include steel companies, manufacturers of electrical equipment, and banks along with two American-owned firms, International Telephone and Telegraph and Honeywell-Bull.

The stock exchange values of most firms in these categories have been dropping, since their future is uncertain. Some have been seeking to circumvent government takeovers by diversifying or by cementing ties with foreign corporations that operate beyond the reach of French law.

Partisans of nationalization emphasize that the public sector in France represents only 11 per cent of total business — a lower proportion than in Austria, Sweden and Italy, and about the same as in Britain and The Netherlands. State ownership here, however, is heavily concentrated in banking, energy,

telecommunications and transportation as well as in the chemical industry.

These partisans also assert that the managers of government-run companies are among the most brilliant figures in the country, and they point to such technocrats as Pierre Dreyfus, who has successfully directed the state-owned Renault Automobile Company.

Other examples of efficiency in the public sector can be seen in the French National Railways, whose trains hold the European record for keeping on schedule, and the French Electric Company, which is a model utility.

Critics of nationalization contend, in contrast, that government-owned firms are not operated on a sound basis, since their staffs are treated like civil servants, with special salary benefits and safeguards against dismissal. Thus, these critics say, public companies are not only costly but they tend to tolerate incompetence.

Opponents of the public sector further argue that the state-owned companies compete unfairly because they pay lower taxes than private firms. Moreover, they can borrow at artificially low interest rates or float loans which are attractive to capital markets because of government guarantees.

It seems to me that nationalization need not be viewed as catastrophic — if the government-owned enterprises are permitted to operate autonomously, providing effective services to the public and showing a profit on their investment while fitting into national planning policies.

That, however, is a tall order. The instances of success in the public sector, such as that of Renault, have been ones in which the state-run companies have put efficiency, profit and service ahead of government planning.

But the influence of government planners has caused problems enough under the present conservative regime here. The other day, for example, Air France director Pierre Giraudet openly denounced the government for what he called "excessive interference" in the management of the company, which is losing more money than any other airline in Western Europe.

According to Giraudet, the government has leaned on Air France to maintain uneconomical services and to use expensive equipment such as the obsolete Caravelle, which consumes enormous quantities of high-cost fuel.

Ms. Grapin writes on economic affairs for *Le Monde*, the Paris daily.

Slouch by Jim Earle



"HOW COULD HE HAVE RUINED THE COUNTRY, HE'S ONLY BEEN IN OFFICE ONE DAY?"

## Vietnam Communist rule by committee

By PAUL VOGLÉ  
United Press International  
BANGKOK, Thailand — Communist rule by committee has become the way of life in Vietnam, less than two years after the last U.S.-backed government in Saigon folded its tents in surrender.

The committee of 492 members of the National Assembly last summer appointed the government, from the president down to deputy minister for elementary education.

A committee of workers at the Hoah Thanh lime factory near Hanoi determined the production goal for the year, a figure not made public.

When the Vietnam Workers party at its congress the week before Christmas determined goals for the coming year, party Secretary Le Duan read the economic committee report.

Keynote speeches at the congress were read by the chairman of its standing committee.

The new rule-by-committee encourages Vietnam Communist neighbors. It calls, it discourages adventurist hot-blooded leaders on the scene of the moment.

Gone are the days when Vietnamese Gen. Van Thuan standing on the battlefield Me Thout in the spring could sense the weak crumbling morale of the Vietnamese army, mobilizing visions virtually without to Hanoi and sweep to a victory in 55 days.

All initiative now comes from the Central Committee, by committee is ideal for inward direction, concerning the economy, the development of agriculture and industry march toward socialism.

Any massive expansion automatically ruled out, since a committee cannot take advantage of a momentary along, for example, the Thai with Cambodia or Laos, as troops into action.

Prime Minister Tanin K. of Thailand, an ardent Communist who rose to power following last year's military Thai leaders and people were too excited about the victory attacks launched on Bangkok Hanoi Radio. He also said his interior minister's war Vietnam would invade Thailand.

The Vietnamese "are concerned with their internal zation" to be sending abroad, he said.

Subversion can be expected to continue. Indeed Vietnam frequently announces that major exports is "contributing world revolution."

## Students are attending games

Editor:

Paul Arnett's column in the Jan. 18 Battalion sort of disturbed me. If there have been only five sellouts at basketball games in the past two years, it isn't because the students haven't been there.

I've seen every conference game in that time, and at most the student section was packed and only the reserved section had any empty seats. Even Arkansas' coach Eddie Sutton was quoted in 1975 as saying A&M has the class crowd in the conference, maybe the country.

I think it's great to see somebody coming out for good of Aggie Spirit the way Mr. Arnett has, I just wish it could be directed at areas that need it more.

—Doug Wright '77

## Battalion

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