



By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

THE RAINBOW WARRIOR IS SINKING Francois Mitterrand, and with him the Socialist Party and what remains of the French left. This is so despite the fact that the right-wing opposition by no means disapproves of sinking the Greenpeace flagship in Auckland, New Zealand, and that the national consensus behind the nuclear policy that dictated the crime has never been stronger.

It is above all the way Mitterrand has handled the scandal as the facts came out that is doing him in. The "tranquil force" was his chosen image, and he liked to say that this time, with a seven-year presidency, the left had time to get things done. But time is running out. Next spring the left is expected to lose parliamentary elections, and pressure will be on Mitterrand to resign rather than to fill out the last two years of his term with a hostile parliament.

Mitterrand's ploy to stay on was to move toward the center with Prime Minister Laurent Fabius and to base "cohabitation" with the right on a split between domestic and foreign affairs. Domestic affairs could be left to a conservative parliament and cabinet, while the president would retain control of his special constitutional domain, foreign and military affairs—a domain in which Mitterrand could rightly claim that his policies enjoy a national consensus.

The policy consensus is undamaged. Everybody loves nuclear deterrence. It is Mitterrand's capacity to manage this popular policy that has lost credibility. Instead of tranquility and strength, the qualities that have come across during the Greenpeace unraveling are procrastination and duplicity.

Press and politicians—even Socialist Party Secretary Lionel Jospin—complained that Mitterrand was "too slow" in dealing with the scandal. Since last July, when New Zealand arrested two agents of the French intelligence agency, the DGSE, it was clear that French responsibility for the explosions that sank the *Rainbow Warrior* and killed photographer Fernando Pereira was going to come out.

According to *Le Figaro*, Fabius immediately proposed a scenario supported by the military. Defense Minister Charles Hernu would take responsibility for an operation that went awry (neither Pereira's death nor getting caught was part of the plan) and resign, France would pay compensation to Pereira's family and discreetly negotiate the release of its agents. But the

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Mitterrand sunk by Rainbow Warrior

"tranquil force" balked.

Certainly Mitterrand did not want to sacrifice Hernu, an old friend and, moreover, as the cabinet minister most popular with the right and the military, the key to Mitterrand's "cohabitation" with a victorious right next year. Instead, he decided to deny everything and let time bury the affair.

But a time bomb was ticking in New Zealand. The French agents are to be brought to trial, evidence is to be presented. Apparently what happened is that Fabius and Interior Minister Pierre Joxe urged Mitterrand to sacrifice Hernu, and when he kept stalling they gave *Le Monde* enough information to force the issue. Thus *Le Monde* came out with its famous September 18 issue announcing that the *Rainbow Warrior* "may have" been sunk by French frogmen acting under orders of top military officers and Defense Minister Hernu. This succeeded in dislodging Hernu who, still denying everything, resigned on September 20, along with the DGSE chief, Admiral Pierre Lacoste. Two days later Fabius made a surprise appearance on television alongside his new defense minister, Paul Quilès, to announce their "discovery" that the *Rainbow Warrior* had been sunk by DGSE agents acting "on orders."

Lingering questions

Suspense. Whose orders? Mitterrand was sending open letters to his prime minister saying he "wanted to know" whether what he read in the papers was true. On another television show, Fabius said he had questioned Lacoste and Hernu and acquired the "conviction" that they had given the orders. But he stressed that "in a democracy such as ours" the civilian authority—that is Hernu—bore the political responsibility. It was necessary to stress this point to calm the mounting wrath of the military at rumors (circulating especially among Mitterrand's defenders) that right-wing officers had carried out the operation without authorization of the Socialist government and even to embarrass it.

But if that were the case, wouldn't Mitterrand have cracked down angrily upon

learning what was done behind his back? Instead, he spent the summer emphasizing French determination to continue nuclear testing in the Pacific and fend off Greenpeace protesters.

It has to be admitted that the right is now offering a more plausible explanation for Mitterrand's procrastination than his supporters. "In defense matters, the president of the Republic has been torn between the imperatives of nuclear armament and concern not to offend socialist and ecologist militants to whom he promised a freeze and then destruction of the nuclear deterrent force," wrote Jean Foyer in *Figaro*. The French navy had the sense to keep the Greenpeace fleet from approaching Mururoa, but the Socialist government "preferred the Auckland coup," which was "just right

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for Mitterrand. Unfortunately for him, it was clumsily executed. At that point, the only dignified course would have been to take public responsibility, explain Greenpeace's machinations and say that France had preferred to sink an empty ship rather than take the risk of sending it to the bottom with crew and passengers. Deep down inside, three-quarters of Socialists would have approved. But what would the militants have said? So it was decided to tell tales.

The top-most opposition leaders with presidential ambitions—Raymond Barre, Jacques Chirac and ex-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing—are keeping a statesman-like silence on the affair and stressing devotion to French nuclear testing against the

enemy ecologists. Their line on the matter has been expressed by Jean Lecanuet, who said the Socialist government had preferred sabotage because they didn't want to have to "expel" the ecologists from Mururoa "with the necessary vigor."

As chairman of the Senate defense and foreign affairs commission, Lecanuet is expressing mild curiosity as to who gave the order to release money from the prime minister's special funds to pay for the caper. But only mild, because although the line of command leads directly to the top (which could further embarrass Mitterrand and Fabius), it leads there by way of General Jean Michel Saulnier, who as Mitterrand's top military aide signed the release of funds for the Auckland operation. As chairman of the joint chiefs of staff since August 1 and a former commander of France's strategic air forces (Mirage nuclear bombers and missiles stationed in southeastern France), Gen. Saulnier is certainly an untouchable, for the right even more than for the left.

As number-one champion of French nuclear forces, Gen. Saulnier no doubt played a leading role in impressing Mitterrand with the anger of personnel at the Pacific nuclear test center over forthcoming Greenpeace protests and with the need to do something to stop them. But this gets into the realm of defense secrets, which in France is protected by a law providing 10 to 20 years in prison for divulging information.

There has been no real newspaper crusade to uncover the truth. Allusions to the Watergate myth are just so much hype. *Figaro's* specialist on anti-Communism Annie Kriegel was not wrong when she wrote: "Why speak of investigative journalism...when journalists accredited to and chosen by a public administration...receive from it a complete authenticated file? It's the same with deliberately organized leaks. The only margin of freedom is that of the editor in chief who does or does not give the green light for publication...." In reality, "investigative journalism" aimed at the secretive French administration is scarcely possible. The initiative for diverse revelations, true or false, is taken from the inside by officials with an axe to grind.

Le Monde at the helm

There is no guarantee that the *Le Monde* operation that dislodged Hernu produced "the truth." What it produced was a version of the facts judged by government sources like Pierre Joxe and *Le Monde's* editors to be both more plausible and more useful—for aiding the two agents imprisoned in

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Appalshop arts center provides an impassioned and eloquent defense of a region

By Pat Aufderheide

I THINK WE'RE JUST TRYING TO LET people see us the way we see ourselves," says Herb E. Smith, one of the founders of a remarkable arts center called Appalshop, nestled in the Kentucky hills. With a 15-year retrospective of Appalshop's films now available for showing at arts centers across the nation, after its debut last winter at Washington, D.C.'s American Film Institute, and with a National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant opening up new production possibilities, Appalshop has moved into a national spotlight. But there's no danger of Appalshop's losing its regional focus.

Appalshop is an unsentimental exercise in authenticity, in fierce defense of a regional culture most commonly portrayed in this country's media in images familiar from "The Beverly Hillbillies" and *L'il Abner*. In films, books, photographic exhibits, records, plays and TV shows, Appalshop testifies that local lifestyles can survive in silicon-chipped mass culture, and more.

It suggests that there's another way to measure the quality of life in the U.S. today: not in terms of how many items from K-Mart you can cram into a kitchen, but in terms of your ability to express yourself in your own language and to live a life in which work and play, family and neighborhood, creation and recreation are part of the same experience.

It didn't start out that way. Back in 1969, when the federal government had singled out Appalachia for poverty-program focus, Whitesburg, Ky., became the site of a community film workshop, to prepare young people for the modern world. Dee Davis, Smith and other high school students were idling away a summer before leaving town, and began playing with the machinery.

"What we grew up knowing," recalls Davis, now a film producer, "was that everyone left Appalachia. My parents often mourned that our 'best and brightest' left as soon as they could. When Appalshop started, it was clearly to train people to get jobs when they left. When we came in, it became a project to keep people there."

A hidden America

One early project became a hilarious little film about an annual coon-on-a-leg contest. (The object is for your dog to get a coon off a log in the river quicker than anybody else's dog.) Other projects and grants followed, and now Appalshop is an entrenched part of the community. Its offices house not only film production facilities but a performance center where dance classes and plays are held. On a \$900,000 budget the producers also maintain a record company and run a TV show. And now they are talking about sponsoring a public radio station.

Some of their endeavors even make money. And they're proud of festival awards

for their films, including one in Portugal last year. These honors are given for films that reveal little-known cultures, and they usually go to Third World filmmakers. Appalshop producers aren't surprised they got it; they have long known that Appalachia is a hidden America to most of us.

Their most important measure of success, though, comes from the folks back home.

"We're not the 60 Minutes of Appalachia," Smith says. "We need to make films about people we respect and admire, and to reach people here with the positive side of their culture as well as with issues that affect them." Appalshop's films use a style that reflects that aim. They rarely use narration, and the camera unobtrusively travels with its subject. The subject is often the kind of person who stubbornly owns his own life, and whose life story illuminates larger realities.

In *Waterground*, the owner of a family flour mill talks about the history of the enterprise, its decline with the rise of corporate mills and the way his business has revived with the national fascination for health food. In *Nature's Way*, an aged farm woman gathers herbs in the forest for her cure-all home remedy, while remarking that she's never been in a hospital except to visit somebody. When her concoction catches fire on the stove, the filmmakers stay with her, letting us see both the mistake and how she copes with it.

For all their respect for nearly-forgotten folkways, these media producers are not on a nostalgia trip, nor are they folklorists on an archiving mission. "We can't preserve culture," explains Davis. "It's bigger than we are." They see their work as part of a wider movement for social justice. For instance, the film *In the Good Old-Fashioned Way*, about a Baptist sect popular among older people in Appalachia, carried a message beyond the one its subjects were preaching. "There was a time when we were there with Vietnam," Smith recalls. "We had been taught, 'Go out and do factory work, join the machine that's sending people to Vietnam. Join the consumer society. Forget what people have learned here.' We felt a real sense of hope for America that the Old Regular Baptist Church even existed."

When a mini-boom hit Appalachia in 1974—the oil price hike had triggered a strip-mining boom in coal—the Appalshop producers began to focus on topical concerns. "I think that until those \$20 bills started floating around, people could believe we were still a haven—living outside the military-industrial complex. We came to see that wasn't true," says Smith.

Then a coal company's dam collapsed, flooding an entire town and killing more than a hundred people. *The Buffalo Creek Flood*, made by Mimi Pickering, is an hour-long exploration of the disaster made with insiders' sensitivity and dextrous professionalism. Stories of eyewitnesses—people who watched neighbors be swept away to certain death—and the bland denials of corporate responsibility by officials provide gruesome contrast.

Several years later, Pickering and others returned to the disaster area. The resulting film, *Buffalo Creek Revisited*, shows that the flood only began the catastrophe. A government reconstruction project had left the locals out of the planning, and had sabotaged the remaining social relations. An impersonal rural slum grew up; the flood had killed not just people but a community.

The stereotyping disease

If communities can be crippled by disaster, they can also be scarred by disease. And that's how Appalshop people see the

pervasive stereotyping of Appalachian hill life. In *Strangers and Kin*, its ambitious and engaging feature documentary, two centuries of put-downs and misunderstandings are brought to life in caricature by a witty team of actor-storytellers. Along with quotations (in costume) from historical documents and clips from films like *Deliverance*, the film

explains the roots of the stereotype in Appalachia's development as a frontier society, a Civil War front, and a mining region.

The film ends with scenes from a recent "Hillbilly Days" festival. Locals pose as their stereotypes, carting jugs of pseudo-moonshine and snapping their suspenders. The film thus ends with a caution that those



Local artisan Chester Cornett appears in *Hand Carved*, an Appalshop film.

