

François Mitterrand (1916-1996)

The fourth president of the 5th Republic, François Mitterrand was one of the most adamant opponents to the 1958 Constitution. His rallying to the regime through the realization of a union of the left will allow the 5th Republic to incorporate changes in power and thus to become more lasting.

[...] now that our party exists, I would like for its first mission be one of conquest. In somewhat technical terms, I would call this its majoritarian vocation. I wish for this party to take power... [...]

I think we must first think of conquering or reconquering the terrain lost to the communists. I think it is not normal that there are today five million French men and women, and sometimes more, who choose the Communist Party in the realm of struggle, and even in the electoral realm, because they have the sense that it's that party that defends their legitimate interests, that defends their lives. I think one of the aspects of the Socialist Party's conquest is to be, with modesty today, leaving to one side the "verbal words," as diplomats say, and without seeking to have a congress effect, the most representative party of all those we have just spoken of. This will not happen, and excuse me for saying so, but through concrete actions. [...]

And then we have to reconquer the liberals [...] the liberals who clearly accept, as we do, the legacy of democracy in the political realm but who refuse our methods and our structures in the economic realm. But for now they are facing a choice which scientific language qualifies as bipolar. We need to lead those who are so disposed to the understanding that [...] if they want justice and law, they are on our side.

And then there are others that are undefinable [...] those who use the metro and mass transportation, parents of students, municipal action groups, who knows who else... All of these people, who are exposed to anarchic organizations and only make, as they say, "concrete" efforts, understand that we are doing anything concrete and that we are squelched by a capitalist society so long as we do not admit—and this is my own evolution, I have been led to understand this—that it is impossible to struggle efficiently and to transform society through an individual job, while refusing strong, political organization.

François Mitterrand, *Discours d'Épinay* (June 13, 1971)
(translation Will Bishop)

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21F.053 Understanding Contemporary French Politics
Spring 2014

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.