

THE LANGDON HALL NON-TEXT : FRENCH RESPONSES

THE FRENCH SITUATION

- 1) France's heavy investment in nuclear energy following the 1973 oil shock ensures that baseload electricity is nearly all produced from a carbon-free source. This has produced a paradoxical effect : on the one hand, it makes France an extremely "virtuous" country in terms of its overall carbon-footprint when compared to similarly sized economies (UK, Italy, and indeed China in exchange-rate GDP) ; but it also means that there is comparatively little low-hanging fruit to be picked in terms of future emissions of greenhouse gasses, including the current Kyoto targets (i.e. the 8% reduction mandated for the EU for the years 2008-2012).
- 2) At the political level, France is also notable in terms of the long-standing public acceptance or at least toleration of nuclear energy : there is little mobilisation against existing current government plans to gradually replace the existing PWR nuclear plants with third generation EPR plants, with several dozen billion Euros of investment planned by France's national electricity producer EDF. What is very new is the important place now occupied by climate change in politics, with much discussion thereof. This development occurred in the early stages of the presidential campaign, encouraged *inter alia*¹ by the Paris meeting of the IPCC in February. Although this sudden and sharp interest has weakened as the campaign has entered into its closing weeks, the issue has become a permanent and significant fixture in the French political landscape. The level of appropriate support for alternative sources of fuel and the content of greenhouse gas taxation are part of the current electoral debate.
- 3) This is the first French presidential election in which none of the two current front-runners have ever stood for the presidency or held top executive level (Presidential or Prime Ministerial) responsibility : the new President will by definition be a rookie, which adds to the uncertainties flowing from a very open set of contests, since the presidential election will be followed in June by the legislative elections.

¹ In domestic terms, the prime mover was a television personality, Nicolas Hulot, who convinced the main presidential hopefuls to sign on to a homemade "Ecological Pact".

POTENTIAL POST-ELECTORAL REACTIONS TO THE NON-TEXT

The generational and political change which will occur as a result of the spring elections means that it would make little sense to review the positions of the outgoing President and Government. What counts is what either Nicolas Sarkozy or Ségolène Royal will do if elected ² It is therefore their statements and their party platforms which will be taken into consideration here. Although far from inconsequential in terms of their potential consequences, their pronouncements, in their current state, emphasize general principles rather than spell out details (this is not specific to environmental issues). More precision in the platforms may emerge in the weeks before the voting : but as is customary in France's presidential monarchy the front-runners will not want to tie their hands too tightly in terms of specific measures beyond a few core policy initiatives. Hence the fragmentary nature of this assessment.

A. Area of explicit consensus

Both front-runners put climate change at the centre of the environmental plank of their platform. For Mme Royal "global warming imposes a radical change in our behaviour"; for M. Sarkozy's UMP "fighting against climate change [is the] priority of priorities". This positioning of climate change as the commanding environmental issue is a recent development : as late as last August the Socialist Party's "Project for France" (which binds the Party as a whole) didn't even mention climate change as such, highlighting instead sustainable development in general terms and the protection of the environment. Naturally, climate change was already a very real consideration (as was demonstrated by the left-wing Jospin government's militant stand in favour of the Rio and Kyoto agreements during its six year tenure in 1997-2002) ; but it was not highlighted in political and electoral pronouncements as the driving environmental issue it has now become.

Both candidates and their parties place heavy emphasis on new fiscal incentives and disincentives in the field of green house gas emission, although they diverge significantly on the specific tools to be used, along traditional Left-Right lines of division (see below). The same remark applies to consensus goals such as the funding

² There is an outside chance that François Bayrou, the Centrist candidate, could make it to the second round of voting. At the time of writing, his platform is practically devoid of any treatment of global warning.

of household energy savings, the development of public transport and the support of rail transportation at the expense of road haulage.

Both emphasize the development of bio-fuels and alternative energy sources generally, although here, as in a number of other instances (e.g. nuclear energy), the policy is driven by the fear of an oil and gas crunch, as much or more than by climate change considerations as such.

In institutional terms, the Right would upgrade environmental issues by establishing a “big ministry of sustainable development including the departments of ecology, energy, transportation, infrastructure and prevention of industrial risks” whereas the Left would create the “position of Vice-Premier in charge of sustainable development”.

There is also consensus expressed in favour of the establishment of a “World Environment Organization” (Royal) or a “global agency for the environment having the power to impose constraints” (UMP), very much along the lines promoted by President Chirac at the IPCC meeting in Paris.

Paradoxically, at the time of writing, neither the candidates’ platforms nor their party programmes even so much as use the word “Kyoto”. This must not be construed as a sign of disaffection or lack of interest, but instead should be viewed as proof that Kyoto is a given which is so deeply integrated in the system that it does not even need to be alluded to. Unfortunately, as a consequence of this absence of a specific mention of Kyoto, there is no language in the current electoral pronouncement stating views on how the quantitative targets of Kyoto should be fulfilled in the coming years. Similarly, no opinion is voiced concerning the way these targets have been dealt with in the recent past.

B. Proposals with climate change implications from the Left (Mme Royal)

- Renewable energy sources should reach 20 % of national consumption by 2020. However, this goal is framed explicitly as a means to pre-empt the depletion of oil and to reduce the share of nuclear energy. Ambiguous signals have been sent during the campaign concerning the future of France’s current plans to build a new generation of nuclear reactors (EPR), oscillating between the continuation of existing building plans and a reconsideration of the modalities of the construction of the first EPR reactor in Flamanville.
- The general implementation of pollution-payer principle (PPP) as the main tools for security ecologically responsible behaviour on the part of industry. PPP as opposed

to regulatory norms, has been widely implemented for many years by right and left wing governments, with a high degree of success in the reduction of water pollution. Although PPP is not mentioned in M. Sarkozy's campaign literature, there is no particular reason to believe that the Right would emphasize a normative and regulatory approach as opposed to PPP. PPP is strongly supported in opinion polls.

➤ Fiscal tools and subsidies :

- a VAT rate “tending to zero” for eco-industry
- the creaming-off on an exceptional basis of the “super-profits of oil companies”, with a view to funding the development of public transportation.

The Socialist Party platform of last summer also mandates :

- the generalization of an “overall tax on Polluting Activities” including an energy related dimension balanced by inducements for household energy savings and the development of renewable energy resources;
- the establishment of a kerosene tax (implicitly aimed at air travel);

It isn't clear whether these last two measures would be implemented by Mme Royal, who has not mentioned them during her campaign.

C. Proposals with climate change proposals from the Right

➤ The network of nuclear power plants will be kept and renewed (*maintenir et renouveler*) while renewable energy will be encouraged with specific measures of “biomass, offshore wind-power, solar heating, photovoltaics, geothermal energy”. An ambitious European environmental R&D programme will be launched “for instance” in favour of hydrogen fuel cell technology, which would become “the Airbus programme of the future”.

➤ . Fiscal tools, subsidies and other inducements :

- the use of the public bidding process to develop environmentally responsible policies and products in the field of energy saving, clean vehicles, biomass, solar energy etc.
- the creation of a CO₂-import tax to be levied on the products of countries which are not bound by commitments to reduce greenhouse gasses. This form of eco-protectionism is reinforced by a political commitment to seek binding

commitments from other countries and “particularly China and the US” in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

- the complete elimination of the taxation of bio-fuels
- the establishment of an “environmental tax credit” applying to corporate and household expenditure in environmental R&D and energy savings.
- the encouragement of the local distribution of agricultural produce (the corresponding inducements are not specified).

Bottom lines

- The creation of a UN Environmental Organization will become one of the major diplomatic goals of the new administration
- notwithstanding the rhetorical nuances between Left and Right, the nuclear programme and its modernization will remain the centrepiece of France’s energy policy and as a consequence of her positioning in terms of greenhouse gasses.
- Pressure for CO₂ protectionism will grow, in part as leverage in favour of the globalization of greenhouse gas reduction commitments in the elaboration of a post-Kyoto emission regime ; but also as part of the general movement in the old industrialized countries of introducing social and ecological norms into ongoing and prospective trade negotiations./.