

International VIEWPOINT

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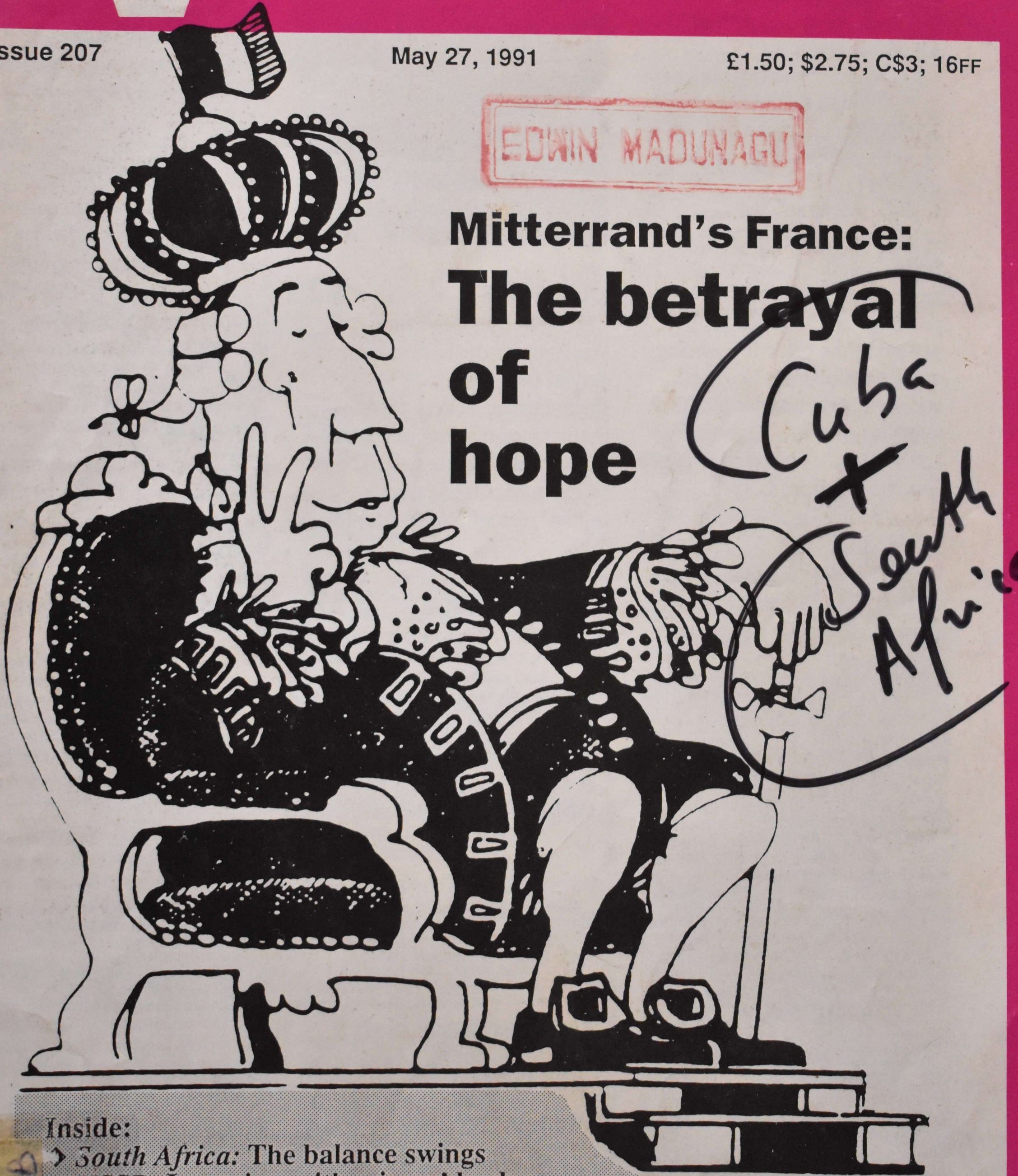
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Mitterrand's France: The betrayal of hope

Cuba
+
South
Africa



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ing theme in everyone's thinking, and gets into every politician's speechifying. But in fact environmental destruction is to be stepped up. The European landscape is to be concreted over, tunneled through and bridged over.

The end of the missing links

The time has arrived for the filling in of Europe's "missing links", that is, the connections that stand in the way of the inflation of traffic. These are:

- The Channel Tunnel between Britain and France. This is one of the biggest construction projects in history with an estimated cost of about \$12bn. While it is true that this will carry a rail link, it will nonetheless mainly carry heavy goods vehicles for a short stretch through the tunnel. For safety and technical reasons a road tunnel was deemed unfeasible.

- The Iberian peninsula is to be connected to the rest of Europe through high-speed railway tracks and a motorway over the Central Pyrenees. Since the tracks will be built according to the norms already existing in the rest of Europe, the Spanish and Portuguese railways, which are of a different gauge, will be excluded from this network, and their future will be threatened. There are no plans for investment in harmonizing European railway tracks.

- The Eurocrats consider the Alps a particular hindrance to the movement of traffic. Furthermore the pigheaded Swiss have a weight limit for heavy goods vehicles of 28 tons (it is 40 tons in the EC) and a ban on night driving for such vehicles (no such restrictions will exist in the EC). As a result there are plans for huge tunnels under the Simplon, Gotthard and Brenner. In the most extravagant versions, the last of these would involve tunneling right under Austria, especially if these people also persist in enforcing a ban on night traffic.

- A row of bridges and tunnels (Scandlink) are to be built between Denmark and Sweden which will connect the Jutland peninsula with Sjaelland and

Sweden.

- The 1180 kilometer long motorway through Yugoslavia is to be converted with massive EC aid. The corresponding connections to Greece and Turkey will also be upgraded.

- There are a whole number of new road building projects which are to "connect eastern Europe to Europe". These are mostly still in the preliminary planning stage. One project however has already been given top priority by the federal German government. A new autobahn is to run along the Baltic from Hamburg to Szczecin.

This orgy of concrete will be supplemented by national road building programmes. The German government is already hatching the necessary laws which will get rid of a whole series of civil rights concerning road building (the right to object and to inquiries), for which constitutional changes are needed.

The question remains: what lies behind the new traffic boom for which these new routes are to be built? There are essentially three sources which feed the growth of freight traffic.

The first and decisive one is the fact that the transport costs of the enterprises are in all cases, whether railways, boats or roads, subsidized by the state. The same is true here as with nuclear power: the profits (from road construction, vehicle manufacture and also through low transport costs) are privatized while the losses and costs of this form of organization of transport are "socialized". Heidelberg's Environment and Projection Institute (UPI) concludes: "Every citizen of this country subsidizes heavy goods' traffic by something between 500 and 1000 marks a year." A sharp rise in fuel prices would be needed to cover the real costs of transport.

But the EC has other ideas: transport costs are to fall further while all restrictions are to be removed. At the same time competition between transport sectors (roads versus railways) will become sharper. Above all, competition between the road hauliers — and drivers — of the whole continent will rise. Everybody will be able to become a road haulier and safety regulations will be radically undermined, by levelling down to the lowest national existing level in the EC. But it will be worth it: even lower transport costs will produce even more traffic.

From this comes the second factor — the trend for industrial production to put its storage costs on the move, on the roads and other transport systems. Needed parts will no longer sit about waiting to be used, but will arrive "just in time" exactly when and where they are needed. This does not of course mean that the

journey time will be absolutely predictable — the congestion will prevent that. Instead the roads will themselves form storage space and buffer zones; the only important thing is that the relevant parts arrive on time at the factory and that the transport costs are smaller than the corresponding storage costs.

The third factor will be increasing subdivision of work, reaching absurd levels. It is for example rational from the company's point of view for Thomson Brandt to have its electrical resistors taken to a government subsidized factory in Malta, where they are installed in precision pumps which are then transported back along the excellent Italian autostradas to the customers in Germany. There are innumerable examples of this type. Thus milk from Bavaria is taken by road to Italy where it is made into yoghurt before being taken back for sale to Germany. The waste cartons are also part of the transport merry-go-round. They will often enough find themselves travelling long distances across Germany to be disposed of in the Wild East.

Productive and unproductive labour

Karl Marx undoubtedly had the European single market in mind when, in the second volume of *Capital*, he considered the question of productive and unproductive transport costs. He arrived at the conclusion that only *economically average necessary* transport costs should be considered as productive, as when raw materials such as iron ore and coal have to be transported for iron and steel production. However, he points out that all this appears in a quite different light to the individual entrepreneur, for whom every valorization of his capital is productive, whether it goes to build schools or is invested in a brothel.

Similarly with the EC transport sector and in respect of the inflation of traffic. "Deregulation" creates more traffic. This brings more private companies into the haulage business. This leads to traffic chaos and to the building of new roads, which requires more private firms. The emissions of pollutants rise massively (some claim that the emission of nitrogen oxides will double in ten years). Trees will die at a still faster rate. But this doesn't matter.

Everything, more concrete, more HGVs, more environmental patching up, more road deaths and costs, more waste, all amounts to an increase in GNP; it just grows and grows and grows....and as it grows, nature and human beings die, while humanity and the quality of life wither. ★