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## Western Europe

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# French elections wake up Europe

by Muriel Mirak

Following the first round of the French presidential elections on April 24, the European press sat up and took notice, as if a flying saucer had landed on the Eiffel Tower. The National Front candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had been characterized variously as a curiosity, a mixture of nostalgia, neo-fascism, populism, and xenophobia, had established his voter strength at 14.4%, running close behind Trilateral Commission member Raymond Barre of the UDF (16.5%) and current Prime Minister Jacques Chirac (19.9%). The incumbent President François Mitterrand established his lead with 34.4%.

What shocked observers, both within France and throughout Europe, was not only Le Pen's national total, but his astounding showing in Marseille, with over 30%, in Alsace, with close to 30%, and in working class suburbs of Paris, where he outpolled the Communist Party (PCF). How could it happen?

The simplistic explanation tendered by Communist Party analysts, both in Moscow and Western Europe, is that "neo-fascism has reared its ugly head." But, as *Le Monde* commented days after the election, "It would be enough to live in a popular [low-income] district of Paris to figure it out: Le Pen's voters are not the racists they are presented as, they are the small people, the cannon-fodder always sacrificed by our generals in all wars. They are the excluded, the penniless, the unfortunate. . . ."

Indeed, the shot fired in France and reverberating through Europe, was fired by a combination of desperate masses of "normal" people, and a clique of behind-the-scenes manipulators.

### The silent majority

Le Pen's vote is a classic protest vote, a vote cast by citizens fed up with the impotence of the national party institutions to allay economic and social woes: increasing unemployment, decaying living standards, a dramatic health crisis spearheaded by drug consumption and the AIDS pandemic,

and terrorism. Although Le Pen exploited working people's job frustrations in Marseille, which is heavily populated by immigrants, by calling for the expulsion of foreign workers and their replacement by the French, not all of his support expressed xenophobia. In Alsace and Lorraine, eastern regions whose steel sector has been decimated by the depression, workers do not feel threatened by foreign labor. It is estimated that one-third of Le Pen's vote came from Communist Party voters, who crossed over to the National Front, because they felt that the PCF would not defend their economic interests.

Le Pen captured these votes, and others, because he appeared to address the issues, which no other contender did. In his mass rallies, he focused on law and order, immigration, AIDS, drugs, and security. In contrast, Chirac's campaign was paralyzed by an unresolved conflict between the technocrats from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA) and Interior Minister Charles Pasqua's traditionalist Gaullist machine; Chirac allowed his campaign to be influenced by the former, who ran an American-style public relations campaign, focused on empty slogans ("Let's go, France! Let's go, Chirac"), and religiously avoiding the issues. Ironically, Chirac was in the best position to exploit real achievements of his government, and could have used his electioneering to mobilize the population around the Marshall Plan for agricultural development, designed by Agriculture Minister François Guillaume; he could have fulfilled the Gaullist aspirations of his electorate by detailing plans for upgrading nuclear defenses, including greater cooperation with West Germany; he could have taken the fight against terrorism, led by his Interior Minister Pasqua, a few steps further.

But, Chirac did not, and his inertia, particularly in the closing week of the campaign, cost him dearly. When the Socialists focused attention on the immigration issue, this threw large chunks of the conservative electorate to Le Pen. And when, just days before the vote, terrorists in New Caledonia acted with ostensible impunity, capturing French gendarmes, the frustrations of a population desiring effective responses to national crises, exploded. They voted for Le Pen.

### The back-room schemers

Simultaneously, in the proverbial, smoke-filled back rooms, French power-brokers were wrapping up their deals. The drop in votes for Chirac in the areas of Auvergne and Bordeaux provides an important clue to what happened. Auvergne, controlled politically by ex-President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and Bordeaux, dominated by one-time Premier Jacques Chaban-Delmas, showed a shift in votes from Chirac, the conservative, to Mitterrand, the socialist, which could only have come about through voter preference directed from above. Considering the fact that Giscard, who has enjoyed close relations with President Mitterrand for years, has been mooted as a possible premier, and as the President of Europe

in 1992, it is not incomprehensible that Giscard would abandon his official political alliances to assure Mitterrand's victory. Thus, in Auvergne, in Bordeaux, and in other areas like the Gironde district, those Chirac votes which had not been captured by Le Pen, were transferred to Mitterrand.

It was not only personal considerations or national politicking which manipulated voter preference for Mitterrand. Powerful international financial groups put out the word shortly before the vote, that Chirac must be defeated at all costs, because his nationalistic policies did not cohere with their plans for supranational integration. These groups backing Mitterrand include the Assicurazioni Generali, the Lazard group, Carlo De Benedetti, as well as leading German and American consortia. Carlo De Benedetti, who has been vying with Chirac allies for control over the Société Générale de Belgique, appeared, in fact, on national television alongside Giscard, at the height of the electoral campaign.

Political manipulation, albeit of a different sort, was also a factor in Le Pen's surprise results. It was, after all, President Mitterrand who put through an electoral reform years back, which allowed for a new political figure, such as Le Pen, to have representation in the National Assembly, proportional to his vote; prior to the reform, only candidates who had won a majority of the vote could gain enough seats to constitute a parliamentary grouping. In point of fact, Mitterrand has promoted Le Pen's rise to political prominence, in hopes of using him to break up the Gaullist formation.

## The future of Europe

In a February issue of the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the Soviets published a raving piece entitled "Yankees and Teutons," which slandered presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche and his wife Helga Zepp-LaRouche, chairwoman of the Patriots for Germany. In the course of its hand-wringing despair over the "danger" that LaRouche might occupy the White House, and that his wife might gain political office in Bonn, the article dubbed LaRouche "the Le Pen of America." In the wake of the French elections, the Moscow-controlled Italian Communist Party (PCI) has been convulsed by internal factionalizing, around what is mistakenly identified as the "right-wing turn" in European and American politics. The external expression of this conflict has been an unprecedented attack against a LaRouche-associated organization in Italy, the POE.

Although the Soviets and their West European mouthpieces express themselves in typically uncouth, crude language, the phenomenon which they identify, albeit in misnomers, is indeed real; and no one knows better than the Russians what the real nature of the phenomenon is. The first round of the French elections registered the existence of a powerful protest vote, which went to Le Pen, because there was no candidate running on a platform capable of addressing the legitimate concerns of the electorate, for economic growth, national security, and public health. There will be, however,

candidates running on a LaRouche program in upcoming elections, not only in France, but throughout the continent. And that, combined with the electoral tide turning consistently in favor of LaRouche candidates within the United States, has Moscow running scared.

In the second round of the French elections on May 8, two candidates of the Parti Ouvrier Européen (POE) are running for local office in by-elections in Vélizy-Villacoublay and Poissy. In October, elections are slated to take place in half of the nation's 3,600 "cantons," roughly equivalent to counties; the POE is recruiting thousands of candidates, including many farmers, to run a nationwide slate. In Italy, the newly formed Patriots for Italy movement, is meeting its first electoral test in by-elections being held in Nave, near Brescia. The slate, led by prominent citizens of the area, will be the springboard for a national campaign when parliamentary elections are called. In Sweden, the LaRouche-associated party, EAP, which has been the target of a years-long disinformation campaign of the KGB, has announced it will participate in parliamentary elections scheduled for September. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Patriots for Germany participated in regional elections in Baden-Württemberg in March, garnering up to 17% in some districts. Although the next regional and city council elections will not be held until 1989, a recruitment drive is already under way for candidates to run both in these elections and in the European Parliament elections in spring 1989.

In short, a European-wide candidates movement is coming into being around the strategic perspective and programmatic platform of Lyndon LaRouche. Although each nation may be experiencing the convergence of crises in slightly differing forms—West Germany feels the threat of Soviet aggression more acutely than, perhaps, France or Italy, while these latter are being hit by economic and social breakdown more dramatically—yet, the fundamental issues facing each are the same. How can Western Europe recover the values of its cultural heritage, and wield the tools of its scientific, industrial, and cultural greatness to rebuild its decaying economy—to again give its citizens a productive role in society, upon which to secure their human dignity? How can the genius of Western civilization be reawakened, to provide the technological wherewithal for Africa and other debt-crushed areas of the developing sector to industrialize? How can Europe rebuild the tattered Western alliance on culturally sound bases, to mobilize the defenses required to thwart Soviet aggressions?

These are the questions brewing in the minds of citizens of Europe's nations. The converging crises which have exploded over the past years and months, have brought these underlying questions to consciousness, and with them, the awareness that "politics as usual" will not, cannot, provide the answers. When no viable alternative is available, this consciousness expresses itself in a "protest vote." When it is, however, then a re-drawing of the political map is underway.