

**RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN FRANCE:  
A STUDY OF THE FRONT NATIONAL**

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**SUNIL KUMAR S.**



**WEST EUROPEAN STUDIES DIVISION  
CENTRE FOR AMERICAN AND WEST EUROPEAN STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI-110067  
INDIA  
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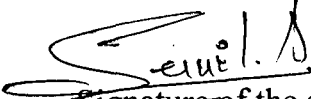


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SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES  
**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY**  
NEW DELHI - 110067

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**CERTIFICATE**

Certified that dissertation entitled “**RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN FRANCE: A STUDY OF THE FRONT NATIONAL**”, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** has not been previously submitted for any other degree to this or any other university and is my own work.

  
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**Prof. Abdul Nafey**  
Chairperson



**Prof. Rajendra K. Jain**  
Supervisor

## PREFACE

Politics is on the decline in Western-style democracies. Since the turn of the new millennium, the extreme Right parties have been the subjects of considerable concern. The revival of extreme Right wing parties in West Europe has attracted considerable attention from both political scientists and political sociologists.

In the 1980s, a variety of extreme Right wing parties within Western Europe achieved notable electoral success. Among them, the *Front National* of France occupied a better position in the national politics.

The academic community has also shown considerable interest in the Le Pen phenomenon and the plethora of recent studies on the *Front National* is adequate testimony to this. But, there is a significant edge to some of the most recent enquiries.

Since 1789 the far right has been an important actor in French political life. The far right in France is not the easiest political tradition to pin down and comprehend – it is in fact no single tradition at all. It is complex in its discourse. France has experienced various cycles of extreme right-wing activity. In fact in different eras has taken on a range of guises, including traditionalism, ultraroyalism, radical nationalism, anti-Semitism and fascism. The counter-revolution of the 1970s gave birth to a range of Right-

wing ideas, and 200 years later the *Front National* emerged-one of the most compelling examples of neo-fascism in action.

The fundamental aim of this dissertation is to examine and analyse the value system of far right in France in general and of the *Front National* in particular. In so doing, it will focus on the ideology and discourse of the party, and it will attempt to depict the main contours and emphasis the doctrines and philosophy of the *Front National* doctrine. It will try to distinguish between the ideology, of the party - the core values, which it upholds – and its discourse: the language in which it parades its doctrine and beliefs. It seeks to examine the ideological development of the *Front National* during the 1980s and early 1990s – a period which was fundamental to the evolution and growth of the party's specific brand of nationalism. The *Front National* has an ability to target and then tap into a variety of constituencies and audiences. Fundamentally, the party actually seems to thrive on controversy. Its hardline platform on immigration and law and order has, for example, aroused profound criticism, for making scapegoats of refugees and asylum-seekers. However, today it has become an entirely modern and professional political formation.

Chapter one traces the rise of the *Front National*, its performance in various regional and national elections in France and elections to the European Parliament since its inception to the present. It also analyses the policies and programme of the *Front National*.

Chapter two examines the views of the *Front National* on European integration and the European Union. The party argues that the European Union puts a question-mark over France's future as a nation.

Chapter three assesses the Front National's impact on the French polity and examines the causes which have facilitated the rise of the *Front National*.

Chapter IV summarises main conclusions and findings.

I wish to express my deep and profound sense of gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Rajendra k. Jain, for his scholarly guidance, inexhaustible patience and constant encouragement. I am deeply indebted to him for helping in channelising my thoughts and giving a definite form and shape to my ideas. I am also indebted to Prof. Vivekanandan B. for his constant guidance and support in the making of this dissertation.

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Among many friends Naresh Kumar B.K., Mrinal Kant Das, Arvind G., Kachamthai helped me with valuable support in many ways.

Last but not the least while various sources have been used in the preparation of this work, I am solely responsible for the views expressed and for any kind of mistake that might have crept in.

**Sunil Kumar S.**

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page No.</b>
<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>i-iv</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: THE FRONT NATIONAL: ITS RISE, ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE AND POLICIES</b>	<b>1-43</b>
<b>CHAPTER II: THE FRONT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION</b>	<b>44-76</b>
<b>CHAPTER III: IMPACT OF THE FRONT NATIONAL ON THE FRENCH POLITY</b>	<b>77-109</b>
<b>CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>110-130</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>131-139</b>

# **CHAPTER I**

## **THE FRONT NATIONAL: ITS RISE, ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE AND POLICIES**



Though the *Front National* achieved unprecedented publicity and electoral support only in the 1980s, the presence of the extreme Right is not a new phenomenon in France: its existence can be traced back to the French Revolution when its hostility was turned towards Republican ideas, and its aim was to rehabilitate the monarchy. More recently, between the wars, while other countries witnessed the rise of fascism and totalitarianism, France saw the emergence of nationalist, anti-communist, anti-Semitic leagues. After the war, though the extreme Right was suppressed, the flame did not burn out completely. The movement gained little support when the French colonial rule ended in many African countries, especially Algeria.

Although it has negligible importance during the time of its inception, it has been one of the key political parties in the French as well as the European politics. Born in 1972, it survived under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen to become a significant force in national politics. The *Front National* was a confederation which gathered together various groups from extreme Right: pro-Vichy, neo-Fascist, former Poujadist and monarchists in favour of Algeria.

*Front National* derives elements from almost every major current of the extreme right wing thought. It provides a common ground between the party's different ideological families: revolutionary nationalists/ neo-fascist, classical nationalists, Royalists, Catholic traditionalists, nationalist

conservatives and the New Right. It caters to the popular anxiety at a time of collective uncertainty.

## **THE RISE OF THE FRONT NATIONAL**

The *Front National*, after its birth in 1972, had stagnated for a number of years. However, its dramatic rise in the 1980s has been one of the most significant developments in French politics. When Le Pen had its first electoral success, there was a tendency to dismiss his idea as a re-run of the Poujadist movement which had achieved success in 1956. The social crisis of the 1970s coupled with issues of immigration and insecurity made Le Pen phenomenon more significant politically and sociologically.

Success first occurred in relatively unimportant by-election where the candidates were well – known figures of the FN. In the Municipal election of 1983, Le Pen's list obtained 11.3 per cent and it end a period of more than two decades that Le Pen had spent in the political wilderness.

In Dreux constituency, the candidates were – Deputy and Mayor Françoise Gaspard of the Socialists, who had a progressive view about immigrants, and Jean-Pierre Stirobis, Le Pen's second in command as Secretary General of the FN, who had nursed the constituency for some time.

In the first ballot the list of the left received 42.7 per cent of the vote, the FN 16.7 per cent and the mainstream right 40.6 per cent. The odds were that the latter would win the second ballot. However, in order to pay it safe, the

moderate right merged the list between the ballots by striking a deal within the FN. It granted the FN and its sympathizers twelve out of thirty nine seats and a number of aldermen. Even though some liberal leaders like Simon Weil rejected this strategy, the honourable leaders like Jacques Chirac and Gaspard did not look back. Even though this victory did not matter much in political terms, it gave a major breakthrough to the FN. In the words of Daniel Singer it turned 'yesterday's untouchable into tomorrow's respectable allies'.<sup>1</sup>

### **The European Elections of 1984**

During the European elections (1984), the political landscape of the country was in order. The Centre-right opposition was still in disarray with leading figures vying with each other for all-important nomination for the coming presidential election in 1988. This was accompanied by the crisis of the left. The Communist had left the government but had lost so much credibility that they could not be a serious focus of opposition. Within the Socialist Party, there was a split between those who accepted the need for economic retrenchment and the acceptance of European Monetary System (EMS) and those who wanted economic growth, devaluation and dose of protectionism.

In this political turmoil, its real take-off came in the 1984 European elections when it registered its first spectacular victory on a national level by

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Singer, "The Resistable Rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (London), vol.14, no.3, 1991, p.373.

attracting 11.2 per cent of the vote and ten seats in European Parliament.<sup>2</sup> It became a step in the direction of political respectability which the far-right had been seeking for four decades. This was not an apparent breakthrough but was a culmination of years of efforts and organization throughout years of margins of electoral politics. The spectacular victory of the FN in this election was explained in a variety of ways. At first sight a great deal of Le Pen's success was explained by his ability to attract votes from those disappointed with the record of the left in power who were also unable to identify themselves with the unconvincing and divided opposition<sup>3</sup>

By successfully exploiting the issues of immigration, law and order and unemployment, Le Pen had successfully attracted votes from them. His tough and humorous speaking styles, in addition to the successful expression of racist sentiment, put him in a position to denounce the other parties as the 'Gang of Four'.<sup>4</sup> Le Pen's success was also assisted by the fact that the Union for a Democratic France (UDF) and the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) fought the elections on a joint list headed by Simion Weil.

### **The Parliamentary Elections of 1986**

From the very birth of the Fifth Republic in 1958, French Deputies were being elected in single-member constituencies by a major system. These

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Eatwell, "The Rebirth of 'Extreme-Right' in Western Europe?", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.53, n.5, 2000, p.70.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Harris, *The Dark side of Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), n.6, pp.73 – 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, n.6, p.74, also see Cole, n.1, p.181.

elections comprised two ballots. A candidate who won an absolute majority of the votes was elected. If no candidate won a majority, then the second ballots would be held within a week. In this the candidates who had received less than the minimum prescribed percentage of votes would be automatically eliminated. Among the others, candidates who had bleak chance of winning would decide to withdraw in favour of the more fortunate candidates. These withdrawals would take place within each of the 'two-coalition's i.e., Communists and Socialists of the left and the Gaullists and Union for a Democratic France (UDF) on the right.<sup>5</sup>

This system had a strong majoritarian bias: a small percentage of the popular vote in favour of one bloc or the other, produced considerable majorities in the National Assembly. The Electoral system thus discriminated against smaller parties and was unrepresentative. After the local elections of 1985, the Socialists began to consider seriously electoral reform. It was necessary because their electoral strength had declined sharply and all the public surveys showed that if legislative elections were held under the same system, the opposition would win an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly. Furthermore, the Socialists were not certain whether they would receive the support for the Communists on the

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<sup>5</sup> Roy C. Macridis, "Five years of Socialist Rule and the Election of March 16, 1986" in Roy C. Macridis (ed.), *Modern Political System: Europe* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1987), pp.136 – 137.

second ballot, and without it their strength in the National Assembly would be even significantly reduced.<sup>6</sup>

The new electoral system enacted in June 1989 was a return to the proportion representation which was practiced between 1945 and 1958. The system made it possible for some parties to campaign throughout the country instead of concentrating in areas where they had a large number of followers. This became an advantage to small parties and electoral novices like the FN.<sup>7</sup> It also promised to reduce considerably the prospective majority of the right in the new chamber, and to face there the respectable right with a new awkward partners, the FN. In the National Assembly elected in 1986 the left in general and the Socialists in particular duly lost their supremacy and the conservative coalition has the barest of majorities. The real winner was FN making its parliamentary debut as Jean-Marie Le Pen re-elected the Palais Bourbon followed by 34 supporters.

Most observers were taken a back by Le Pen's score of 14.4 per cent. That one French adult in every seven should have voted for the xenophobic FN was really shocking.<sup>8</sup> The social and economic conditions which existed during that period, however, favoured the FN. Officially, unemployment had gone up from about 1.6 million in 1981 to about 2.3 million in 1986. The unofficial figures numbered the unemployment to be 2.7 million which was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp.137-8.

<sup>7</sup> Yves Menny, *The French Political System* (Paris: La Documentation Francaise, 1998), p.44.

<sup>8</sup> Singer, n.16, p.375.

over 12 per cent of the working force. Seventy nine per cent of the French considered unemployment to be the central and most critical problem facing their country. Sixty-five per cent mentioned “security” – law and order. It covered disorders, thefts, acts of violence and acts of terrorism in the streets of urban centers and was linked in the eyes of many to immigrant workers. According to the estimates, there were 4 million foreigners residing in France among whom 2 million were “non-Europeans”. Not only that they accused of violence and crime, they were also viewed as a burden on the economy and an additional cause for high rate of unemployment.<sup>9</sup>

Le Pen in his campaign cleverly exploited this situation to attract the votes. As the only man against the ‘Establishment’, which was the cause for the above situation, he had told the Frenchmen in short: “you’ve seen them all ‘if you want to get on with inflation, unemployment, insecurity and foreign invasion, keep the ‘gang of four’. But, if you want change, you can only vote for me”. And it did work to some extent, Le Pen had received about one quarter of the votes cast in the southern regions around Nice, Marseille and Toulon. In the industrial north, in the suburbs of Paris or in Alsace and Lorraine and in towns particularly affected by the economic crisis, he gained about one fifth. In Brittany, with no immigrants workers in sight, he obtained between 8 to 9 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Macridis, n.21, p.141.

<sup>10</sup> Singer, n.16, p.375.

Whether the issue of immigrants was real or imaginary was not important, but it became critical as the elections approached. Though it was not the only issue which it helped the FN to gain its majority, the change in the electoral system came as a blessing in disguise.

### **The Presidential Elections**

The presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen as a candidate to the presidential post in the elections of 1988 could not but propel the issue of immigration, especially in the view of the strains between the two first round candidates of the mainstream right – Raymond Barre and Jacques Chirac – on precisely this theme. However, in one of the television interviews before the elections, Le Pen put himself in a precarious position. During the interview he said, “I do not say gas-chambers did not exist....I have specially studied the question. But I do believe that it is a point of detail in the history of the Second World War.” When the shocked interviewers expressed horror that he could consider the death of six million people as a point of detail, he replied that the fact of the holocaust could not be considered “ a truth, revealed in which everyone must be a moral obligation”.<sup>11</sup>

These remarks cost him to an extent. One of his key supporters in European Parliament, Olivier d’ Ormesson left the FN as a response to Le Pen’s failure to withdraw his remark. Many commentators felt that Le Pen had run out of steam. A *Le Monde* poll published in November 1987 claimed that Le Pen

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<sup>11</sup> Harris, n.6, p.65.



was a declining force, as a number of people saw him as a threat to the nation and as a man who should never become a Minister.<sup>12</sup> The election campaign was well under way in March 1988 and immigration proved to be a key election issue.

Another issue which came up during the 1988 presidential elections related to France's position in the existing European Community. With the dream of German unification becoming a reality, France perceived it as a dominant force in the Community. It tended to threaten its national identity and weakened its position against its historical rival - Germany.<sup>13</sup>

In the May 1988 presidential elections the first presidential election after Le Pen's emergence on the national scene -- contrary to the views of the all opinion polls, Le Pen had the greatest impact and scored his greatest electoral success when he received 14.39 per cent of the votes cast. He thus had progressed by 3.5 percentage points during 14 years. In several departments, this figure rose to well above 20 percent, to 26 per cent in the Bouches-du-Rhône (around Marseilles) and between 23 and 25 per cent in the other southern departments of Var, Vaucluse and Alpes-Maritimes. Immigration formed a central plank in the party's electoral platform.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., n.6, p.97.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Sutton, "France: Who Beats the Nationalist Drum?", *World Today* (London), vol.47, no.6, June 1991, p.99.

<sup>14</sup> Philip E. Ogden, "Immigration to France Since 1945: Myth and Reality", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.14, no. 3, 1991, p. 295.

The explanation of this was not so much pre-occupation with immigration as fear of Europe, especially the dismantling of frontiers on the Rhine and the implementation of Single Market in the post-1992 period.<sup>15</sup> This analysis of election results confirmed that Le Pen's appeal had been effective beyond the singly issue of race.

International concern greeted the FN candidates election score and for a while Le Pen was on the front pages of most of the world's press. However, foreign observers were duly relived in the few weeks in the National Assembly election where Le Pen's vote slipped below 10 per cent. This election was held on the two round system and not an proportional representation as in 1986 which had helped Le Pen with his first national level electoral success. Le Pen lost all but one of his parliamentarians, including his own. But this defeat was seen as the end of FN only by the superficial observers as the party achieved dramatic success in the coming second round by elections run-off in December 1989 at Dreux.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Elections of 1989**

In the spring of 1989 Le Pen expressed the hope that in the European Parliament elections, he would improve his score. Even though Le Pen won only 10 seats with 11.7 per cent of votes in Strasbourg Assembly,<sup>17</sup> which

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<sup>15</sup> Sutton, n.30, p.99.

<sup>16</sup> Anne Stevens, *The Government and Politics of France* (London: Macmillon Press Ltd., 1996), p.268.

<sup>17</sup> Rodgers, n.5, p.70 also see Sulon, n.30, p.98.

was based on proportional representation, he confirmed that under his leadership the FN had achieved a firm electoral base.

Voting intentions which used to stagnate around 8 to 9 per cent, jumped to 11 percent in November 1989 and to 12.5 per cent the following month. This sudden increase, both national and local, could be explained on the basis of the convergence of a number of social and political factors.<sup>18</sup> Three Muslim girls, two Moroccan and one Tunisian all of whom were pupils at a secondary school in Creil in the suburbs of Paris, claimed the right to cover their heads in the class room in confirmative with the requirement of Islam. Since French law prohibits all forms of religious propaganda in state schools, the headmaster, who considered the action of Muslim girls to be 'provocative' asked them to cease wearing them in the class room. In spite of it the girls repeated their action due to which they were not allowed to come into the class room. When the media made it an issue it brought about a number of debates about French identity.

In fact, in October 1989 the incident of the "Islamic headscarf" created "a national stir and helped mobilize opinion in favor of the *National Front*....The French Left itself was divided. In the Socialist Party, those who considered themselves to be the defenders of nonreligious education and feminists were generally in favour of a total ban on the headscarf,

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre Brechon and Subrata Kumar Mitra, "National Front in France: The Emergence of Extreme Right Protest Movement", *Comparative Politics* (New York), vol.25, no.1, October 1992, p.66.

whereas other, including the wife of President Mitterrand, were for tolerance in the name of the liberty of expression and respect for different value systems".<sup>19</sup>

Among the Muslims, this promoted "a first step towards creating community structures in adverse social environment". As a reaction to the views of liberal weekly *L' Express* which portrayed the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic conspiracy. One of the Muslim leaders observed that "a French women with a scarf is a chic, but a Muslim women with a scarf is a threat to civilization".<sup>20</sup>

The *National Front*, in marked contrast to the other parties used the incident for political propaganda. It argued that the incident demonstrated a form of religious and cultural colonization of France that threatened the very identity. The incident served to catalyse French opinion of issues of the position of immigrants in France, particularly those from North Africa.

The FN succeeded in electing Marie-France Stirbois widow of a former FN leader killed in an automobile accident in November 1988, to the National Assembly when she received over 60 per cent of the vote against only an Rassemblement pour la Republique (RPR) candidate in the second round by-election run-off in December 1989 at Dreux. The FN also came close to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., n.1, p.67.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach, "Introduction: Islam in Europe and Politics of Religion and Community" in Stevan Vertovec and Ceri Peach (eds.), *Islam in Europe : The Politics of Religion and Community* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.7.

electing a second deputy from Marseilles at the same time.<sup>21</sup> Although these results were not expected, it did not come as a shock like the 1984 results which was sudden. The 'headscarf affair' eventually resolved itself but it evoked a reprise of all debated and discussions of the early and mid-1980s about the concept of identity. In spite of the lack of all politics in France, it remained as a political reality in many parts of France. Having held ground in 1989 in various elections, Le Pen developed into a force in French politics.

### ***The Front National in the 1990s***

In the international arena, the European dream was beginning to turn sour. The national sense of identity was threatened by unstoppable flow of immigrants. Unemployment had risen and the government insisted not on altering the economic policy. To add to this, the vague fear existed that France no longer counted among the world's leading powers. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany had put a question mark on the position of France in Europe. Within the country, politics had become a bore for the men on the streets and they had lost faith in the political leaders. All the main parties were in disarray, absorbed by their own rivalries. Corruption scandals abounded and the election abstention rates were at a record high. At this time, the only party that seemed to have anything to offer was the *Front National*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Harris, n.6, p.102, also see Husbands, n.27, p.91.

<sup>22</sup> *The Economist* (London), 19 October 1991, p.57.

Le Pen, instead of losing a part of his support, profited from the incident at Carpentras. Carpentras, hometown of the oldest Jewish communities in France, became a name etched on many minds in the 1990s. For many in 1990, the town's Jewish cemetery was desecrated and headstones were daubed with swastikas, graves opened up and the corpse taken off from the coffin was mutilated. The protest took out against anti-Semitism and racism. France witnessed the march of some 200,000 people who detested the incident. Although there was widespread suspension at the involvement of *Front National* in the act, this movement helped Le Pen to gain more support. He declared himself the innocent victim of the affair when no FN connection was discovered and went on to say that the rest of the parties were trying to target him.<sup>23</sup>

All this resulted in the rise of voting intentions in July 1990, especially after the issue of desecration of Carpentras came to an end. However, the proportions went down in the second fortnight of September 1990 after the remarks of Le Pen in favour of Iraq. He argued that Iraq was historically entitled to the territory and that Kuwait itself was an artificial creation of the British Foreign office. He added that the conflict should be treated as a purely Arab affair rather than the concern of any coalition led by the United States.<sup>24</sup> Le Pen struck to his opinion that France should not be engaged in any ill-judged Anglo-Saxon adventure. While seeking to assume the mental

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<sup>23</sup> *The Economist*, 6 April 1991, p.48 also see Sutton, n.30, p.100.

<sup>24</sup> Sutton, n.30, p.100.

of an expert in real politik, Le Pen turned a blind eye to the elementary principals of international law. While connecting these issues to the immigrants, it was believed that the Meghrebis present in France would constitute the 'fifth column' of support for Saddam Hussein. Le Pen regarded Saddam Hussein to be a friend. He flew to Baghdad in 1990 to free Frenchmen held there after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and said he found nothing outrageous in Iraqi policies that led to the Gulf War.<sup>25</sup> The simple rationale behind this was that the Meghrebis would automatically support was because he was an Arab and that they would be more likely to find sympathy with him than the western forces of which France was an active member.<sup>26</sup>

These remarks were not very controversial to the general public and therefore did not influence the voting intensions to any great extent. The support lingered on once the events lingered on the first real test of the nation's political mood since election to the European Parliament of 1989, came about in March 1992 during the regional elections, the opinion polls agreed that the ruling Socialist Party would take a drubbing and the extreme right wing FN and ecologists would see a purge in support. Accordingly, the FN candidate took a commending lead in the first round with 38 per cent of the vote while Socialist scrapped only 12 per cent at the by election in Nice.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 23 April 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Cole, n.1, p.231.

<sup>27</sup> *The Economist*, 22 February 1992, p.48.

Alarmed by this result, the Socialists decided to take precaution so as not to lose out to the FN in the ensuing regional elections. They adopted the all out attack tactic: Socialist militants helped organize local anti-Le Pen demonstrations, which frequently degenerated into violence. The government then banned all the FN meetings on the ground that they constituted a threat to public order. Although Le Pen took advantage of the situation, he accused the Socialists of creating “an atmosphere of violence to intimidate FN supporters”. He appeared before million of television viewers as a persecuted martyr who was holding their democratic right of free expression against the “totalitarian” practices of the government.

The *Front National* won 13.9 per cent of vote, up four points on its score in the previous regional elections six years ago. But, it polled 13.9 per cent nationally and failed to capture Province – Alpes – Cotes d’Azur, where he won only 19.76 per cent of the votes. This was well below the expectations of the FN leaders and supporters. It was mainly because of immigration and crime. These were the FN’s two favorite themes, which were not considered of prime importance by the people other than the Front’s own supporters. This election, on other hand, expressed the general discomfort among the voters. President Mitterand gave the impression of having run out of the stream after 12 years in office: no new ideas, no “ground project” with which to inspire the nation. His misjudgment of foreign policy, especially position towards Germany unification, was embarrassing and at home, the



appointment of Edith Cresson as Prime Minister proved a disaster.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the traditional supporters of centre parties shifted their support between the Greens and the FN. The situation worsened for the FN in the 1993 Parliamentary election. These were held in two rounds. The ruling Socialist Party halved its share of votes. The Rassemblement pour la Republique (RPR) became the strongest party while center –Right Union for a Democratic France became the second strongest. As a result Rassemblement pour la Republique (RPR) and Union for a Democratic France (UDF) together controlled over three quarters of seats in National Assembly. Despite widespread disaffection with mainstream parties, small parties, including FN, did not fare well. FN lost the seat which it had held since 1989 by-election in Dreux when Marie-France Stribois lost by 105 votes. Jean-Marie Le Pen himself failed to win Nice – a region where FN support was traditionally very strong.

In 1994, at the European Parliament election, the mainstream parties of France lost support. Right-of-center parties in general perform better than the left. The *Front National* lost some of its electorate in Phillippe le Jolis de Villiers de Saintgnon, a dissident right wing deputy. His campaign had several themes in common with that of the FN – such as the defence of moral and family values, the assertion of France’s greatness, and desire to

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<sup>28</sup> *The Economist*, 19 October 1991, p.57. also see *The Economist*, 28 March 1992, p.47.

see France independence from Europe. Thus de Villiers obtained 12.33 per cent of the votes in contrast to 10.5 per cent of FN.<sup>29</sup>

The tempo of the masses had continued during the 1995 Presidential election: none of the candidates managed to persuade voters that they had much to offer. The electorate was highly volatile and nearly a third of voters had not made up their minds until before the day of the voting. Confronted by what seemed to many as an unappealing choice between a third seven years term for Socialist President and a scandal plugged Gaullist government, more than half of French voters either stayed at home or voted for a fringe candidate.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of issues, the campaign was dominated by unemployment, standing at 12.2 per cent (3.26 million) in April 1995, and associated themes of social deprivation and 'exclusion'. Leader of the far-right *Front National* Jean-Marie Le Pen, who hoped to surpass his astonishing score of 14.4 per cent in the 1988 presidential first ballot (and whose main campaign pledges were to institute a 'national preference' in the allocation of jobs, housing and welfare benefits, and to repatriate 3 million non-European immigrants over seven years). Chirac concentrated on diagnosing the problems, discerning a state of social emergency in France, with the loss of public confidence in governing elites, chronic unemployment and the mounting social ills of poverty, homelessness and intolerance towards minorities.

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<sup>29</sup> Rodgers, n.5, p.70, also see *The Economist*, 18 June 1994, p.53.

<sup>30</sup> *The Economist*, 29 April 1995, p. 57.

The Maastricht Treaty and The European Community also acted as the main issue in this election. Three leading critics of Europe, viz. Jean-Marie Le Pen of the far-right, the Communist Robert Hue and Conservative Phillip de Villiers -- expected to pick quarter of the first round vote. De Villiers won 4.75 per cent while Le Pen raised eye brows and fears by winning 15 per cent of the vote – a record for his extreme right , anti-immigration party.<sup>31</sup>

The two shocks of the first round were Jospin's margin of advance on the favourite Chirac and the strength of Le Pen, who registered the highest vote achieved by the extreme right in a French national election. This election marked the culmination of Le Pen's legitimacy as an actor in the French political process with media attention focused on the Chirac-Balladur duel, Le Pen was able to run a normal campaign largely devoid of adverse publicity. Capitalizing on new guidelines by the Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA) on the equitable representation of candidates, he gained considerably greater access than in 1988 to the major television and radio platforms. Combining Le Pen's 15 per cent with the 4.7 per cent won by de Villiers the ultra-nationalist vote in this election fell just short of 20 per cent.

Though his populist campaign wooed large sections of the young and student electorates. Chirac attracted less support from Socialist, Communist and extreme – left sympathizers than Le Pen. One of the most striking features of this election, compared with that of 1988, was the drop in the

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<sup>31</sup> Rodgers, n.5, p.70.

working class vote for the Socialist candidate from 43 per cent to 21 per cent, making the FN leader the main candidate of the industrial working class. More tellingly, while 17 per cent of *defavorises* voted for Jospin and 13 per cent for Hue, fully 34 per cent voted for Le Pen. Among the unemployed, too, a number of polls credited Le Pen with the highest levels of support.

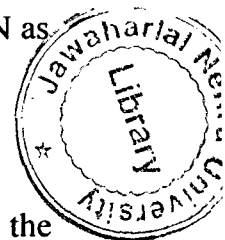
The 1995 presidential election brought the curtain down on fourteen years of *Mitterrandisine*. The success of the presidential election for Le Pen was carried over into the June 1995 local elections, which saw the FN make some important breakthroughs. The towns of Toulon, Orange, Marignane and (in early 1997) Vitrolles were all won by the FN in its south/south-east bastion area.<sup>32</sup> These three triumphs were followed, in February 1997, by the success of Catherine Megret in Vitrolles. This confirmed the party's progress at the local level and proved that grass root work in the establishment of a party infrastructure was bearing fruit. The three cities where FN had a majority were in south and had large immigration communities. The *National Front*, which advocates repatriating immigrants and giving priority in housing and healthcare to French-born citizens, made inroads in central France and the Paris suburbs but notched up its highest scores around its strongholds in the South and East.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Hainsworth, "The Right: Divisions and Cleavages in *fin de Siecle* France" in Robert Elgie (ed.), *The Changing French Political System* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), n.1, p.50.

<sup>33</sup> *The Times* (London), 27 May 1997.

The FN proposed a return to full employment by removing immigrants from one million jobs which could be occupied by French nationals, establishing a "parental income" to encourage mothers to devote themselves to child-rearing, slashing the tax and social security levies on employers, unbinding France from Maastricht, and raising tariff barriers against imports. The two outright winners of this first round were the Parti Socialiste (PS) and the FN. With 14.94 per cent (3.78 million votes), the FN registered its highest result ever a parliamentary election, up by 630,000 votes on its 12.42 per cent score in 1993. This was on a par with the 15 per cent won by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the 1995 presidential election, confirming the FN as the third largest party in France.<sup>34</sup>



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This put the FN in a position to contest 133 (almost one in four) seats on the second ballot. The FN consolidated the ground won by Le Pen in the 1995 presidential election, with its real areas of growth located in a sweep of regions across the north and north-east (Picardie, Champagne-Ardenne, Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comte). In the southern Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur region, the party confirmed its strength with scores above 20 per cent in thirty-four out of forty constituencies, rising to over 30 per cent in the strong-holds of Marseille, Toulon and Marignane-Vitrolles. In all, FN candidates secured 20-30 per cent of the vote in over 100 of France's 555 metropolitan constituencies, including that of Bouches-du-Rhone 4<sup>th</sup> (Marseille), where Jean-Jacques Susini, former leader in the terrorist

<sup>34</sup> James G. Shield, "Europe's other Landslide: The French National Assembly Elections of May-June 1997" *Diss* 68, no. 4, Oct-Dec 1997, p. 416.

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Organisation Armee Secrete (OAS), topped the poll with 30.89 per cent. Susini's CV includes some years spent in exile under sentence of death for plotting to assassinate President de Gaulle after the granting of independence to Algeria in 1962.<sup>35</sup>

The party attracted 24 per cent of blue-collar voters, 22 per cent of the unemployed and 29 per cent of those describing themselves as disadvantaged compared with much lower levels of support among the same groups for the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF) (13-16 per cent). The FN also continues to exert a strong appeal to the more traditionally conservative, small self-employed categories (shopkeepers, artisans) on which it drew for its early support (23 per cent), with weaker support among farmers, liberal professions, management and white-collar workers (10-16 per cent).<sup>36</sup>

In the 1997 legislative elections held on May 25 and June 1 the neo-fascist *Front National* improved on its 1993 score, polling just under 15 percent in the first round and winning one seat in the new assembly. It looked as though it has dug itself in for the long haul on a national level. It increasingly set its sights on taking power, alone or in alliance with major splits it expects from the traditional right. It took one municipal government after another in the south of the country and was only kept out of parliament (it had one seat now) by an undemocratic voting system that works against it - for the time being.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.417.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.418.

In the March 1998 regional elections, the FN won tangible rewards for achieving yet another record score (15.2 per cent and the 275 seats, compared to 13.7 per cent and 137 seats in 1992).<sup>37</sup> This, however, triggered the discontentment, which had lingered for some time, to come into open. Antagonism developed between supporters of Le Pen and that of Bruno Megret.

This cocktail of strategy, rivalry and ambition tested the party's cohesion to breaking point. Division within the Front became all the more evident after the 1998 regional election. Bruno Megret, the deputy leader of the FN who was running for parliament in Vitroller, said that the party would probably "wait and see what the centre-right parties have to say".<sup>38</sup> The 'Megretistes' wanted to improve the support and increase the number of seats in National Assembly by forging an alliance with the centre-right parties of Rassemblement pour la Republique (RPR) – Union for a Democratic France (UDF).

To add fuel to the fire, Le Pen committed disastrous errors during and after the 1997 election which brought matter to the brink: between the ballots he mused aloud that that he would prefer a left-wing government to be elected in the hope of President Chirac to resign, he decided not to stand for election in order to prepare himself for regional council election and for Presidential

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<sup>37</sup> Hainsworth, n.1, p.51.

<sup>38</sup> *The Times*, 27 May 1997.

election should Chirac resign, whilst campaigning he assaulted a woman Socialist candidate, resulting in a court disqualifying him from holding all public elected offices for one year. The last error was the most significant as Le Pen reacted by announcing that his wife, Jany should take his place at the head of the list for the 1999 European elections. This outraged the ‘megretistes’ who believed that their man second in command – should lead the list.<sup>39</sup> After a national council meeting in December 1998, which degenerated into a shouting march, Le Pen expelled Megret and his key supporters<sup>40</sup> who went on to organise themselves the Movement National.

This split within the Front promoted a scramble for votes and had a great influence on the extreme right in France. The 1999 European Parliament elections saw the Front receive just over 5 per cent of the vote and had 5 members of European Parliament as compared to the Movement National which managed just over 3 per cent.

### **The 2002 Presidential Election**

The French went to the polls in four consecutive ballots between April and June 2002 to elect the President on April 21 and May 5, and the National Assembly on June 9 and 16. The shock result of the first presidential ballot on April 21 was to colour all three subsequent ballots.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Hansworth, n.1, p.451.

<sup>40</sup> Hainsworth, n.1, pp.52-53.

<sup>41</sup> David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, “Presidentialism Restored: The French Elections of April-May and June 2002”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.55, no. 4, Oct. 2002, p. 643.



This election was above all about rejection. On the one hand, there was the rejection of the election itself on the part of the many who stayed at home, on the other the rejection of the traditional political class, represented by the candidates of the parties of government. Together these elements contributed to the downfall of Lionel Jospin and to the freak presence of the leader of a xenophobic, populist party of the extreme Right in the second round of the most important election in French political life.<sup>42</sup>

This election presented a departure from the norms of the presidential polls in France in that voters will choose the head of the state for a five years term instead of seven years as in the past. Legislative elections were to follow in June 2002. The French thus hope to put an end to “cohabitation”, the unique power-sharing formula under which the country's President and Prime Minister can belong to conflicting political parties. Ultimately Jean-Marie Le Pen, for all his notoriety, turned out to be an opponent every politician dreams about.<sup>43</sup>

Initially there had seemed to be room for surprise. After their five years of cohabitation the two heads of the executive, incumbent President Jacques Chirac and PM Lionel Jospin, were favourites by far. When Chirac and Jospin were slugging it out in the ring, other candidates were finding it difficult to get there. In order to become eligible to contest, a person needs the backing of 500 local officials. At one instance, Le Pen still needed 27

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<sup>42</sup> Arnauld Miguet, “The French Election of 2002”, *West European Politics*, vol. 25, no. 4, October 2002, p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 07 May 2002.

signatures to qualify and election observers thought that, he would not make it to the final list. He was tipped to win about 10 per cent of the vote in the first round, a score that could damage president Jacques Chirac's prospects.

On the evening of 21 April 2002, surprise at the results was soon replaced by shock: Lionel Jospin had been eliminated, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the extreme Right *Front National* finished a close second behind the outgoing President Jacques Chirac in the French presidential elections, eliminating Socialist PM Lionel Jospin from the second round of voting on May 5<sup>th</sup> and from politics.

The figures of the first round were quite startling and revealing. On a record low turn out of 71.6 per cent, and despite a poor showing of 19.88 per cent of votes cast it was Jacques Chirac who came in first, Le Pen got 16.86 per cent, just popping the Socialist candidates Lionel Jospin who got 16.16 per cent.

Jacques Chirac's result was the worst ever obtained by a President seeking re-elections. But, on the other hand Jean-Marie Le Pen became Chirac's opponent for the second round with his best-ever result. A slight rise in the vote for the extreme right and a fall in the Socialist vote combined to push Le Pen rather than Jospin into the second ballot. Le Pen, at 73 years of age was one of the most experienced politicians in the campaign. He achieved 17 per cent of the vote, a steady rise of two points over his 1995

score and three points in relation to 1988. His electoral performance is a story of unfaltering advance. Megret's Mouvement National Republicain (MNR) poor (2.3 per cent) showing on the first round reminded in extreme right that Le Pen's F.N is a one-man show.

His campaign also emphasized anti-European themes (proposing a referendum on the EU and on the franc) anti-globalisation and unemployment. His first ballot supports (16.86 per cent) came from virtually all classes and all categories, but was strongest in the self-employed, lower-middle and working classes. Le Pen's voters were motivated primarily by concern over 'security', i.e., law and order (68 per cent), immigration (57 per cent), and corruption (37 per cent).<sup>44</sup>

In the first round, one-third of the French electorate stayed at home and more importantly, only one-third voted for the parties of government, whether of the Left or Right. The growth of the protest vote is not a recent phenomenon, but 21 April 2002 turned into a festival of protest. The candidates from extremist parties or parties outside the system obtained unprecedented results. Jean-Marie Le Pen increased his vote by 2,50,000 compared to 1995. The number was small but the differences was huge.

Analyst said several factors contributed to Le Pen's surge. First was public apathy with the two major parties, Jospin's Socialists and Chirac's Gaullists. Second was the date of voters abstention – 27 per cent electorate.

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<sup>44</sup> Bell, n.4, p.653.

Third was widespread discontent with the political status quo and a legacy of corruption from past party finance scandals. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks and a series of spectacular crimes in France, including the recent massacre of city officials in a town hall just outside Paris, Le Pen was able to exploit a perceived sentiment of rising crime and insecurity.<sup>45</sup>

If he was elected President, Le Pen pledged to renegotiate the treaties binding France to the European Union, bring back the death penalty, build 2,00,000 jail cells and deport illegal immigrants or any foreigner sent to prison.<sup>46</sup> But a score less than 30 per cent would represent a sorry defeat for him, he said.

Le Pen's victory over Lionel Jospin belatedly mobilized the Left. The streets and boulevards streamed with demonstrations of rueful Trotskyists who had reviled Jospin, but now turned out to defend the Republic. All the parties, except Arlette Laguiller's Trotskyist Lutte Ouvriere and Bruno Megret's Mouvement National Republicain (MNR) called for people to come out and vote against Le Pen. Demonstrations were held every day of the two weeks separating the first and second rounds, with as many as 1.5 million people gathering to protest against the extreme Right on May Day. This anti-Le Pen mobilization worked overwhelmingly to President Jacques Chirac's benefit.

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<sup>45</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 23 April 2002.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 April 2002.

With an extraordinary degree of mobilization and with a higher turnout (forty one million), Jacques Chirac won a second presidential term with over 80 per cent of the vote. Ironically, the man who had won the least numbers of votes ever of any right-wing first-round winner was elected President with the biggest-ever margin in the history of the present Fifth Republic, inaugurated in 1958 by Charles de Gaulle.

Massive demonstrations were held against Le Pen in the interesting two weeks between the first and second ballot, with the left rallying to the somewhat desperate but realistic slogan – ‘better a crook (Chirac) than a Fascist (Le Pen)’. Some scholars observe the collective sigh of relief that was heard when the second round result of 82 per cent of Chirac and just under 18 per cent for Le Pen echoed not only within the country but throughout Western Europe.

### **The National Assembly Elections of 2002**

Two months of elections which started and ended in unprecedented apathy with a brief interlude when millions hit the streets in protest after a shock score by the far right. So, having handily defeating Le Pen with 82.5 per cent of the vote, Chirac now faced a more difficult task- helping his allies with the legislative elections on June 9 and 16, 2002. None of the public opinion institutes, had it right when Jean-Marie Le Pen, the right –wing extremist, beat Leonel Jospin, the formers Socialist Prime Minister, to

advance in April to the final round of presidential balloting against Chirac last month.

In the first round, the observers estimated that the far-right will pick up 13 per cent of the vote, but between zero and four seats in the National Assembly. The first round suggested that the anti-immigration extreme on the right had lost ground since Le Pen shocked Europe in April by winning second place in the presidential election, sending the Socialist leader Lionel Jospin into political oblivion and leaving his party in disarray.<sup>47</sup> Chirac's newly created centre-right Union for a Presidential Majority and its alliance took 399 of the 577 seats in the National Assembly, stripping Socialist and other leftist parties of their parliamentary majority and leaving them within 178 seats, according to official results Monday.

The election which decisive in creating a parliamentary majority for Chirac, left some imponderables.<sup>48</sup> For instance, the anti-immigrant *National Front* failed to win any seats despite leader Jean-Marie Le Pen's fleeting success in qualifying for the presidential run-off vote against Chirac some eight weeks ago. The French drummed the extreme right back to the sideline. The election also marks the virtual disappearance of the once powerful Communist Party, many of whose working class supporters have switched their allegiance to Le Pen. The balloting represented a slap to the *National Front*, the far right party of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which was shut out of the

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<sup>47</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 11 June 2002.

<sup>48</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 19 June 2002.

Assembly after the strong performance of its leader in presidential elections last month shocked international opinion.

But, some of the FN's candidates, such as Marine Le Pen, Le Pen's 33 year old daughter, nonetheless received about one-third of the votes in the few districts where they reached the second round of voting.

### **THE POLITICAL PROGRAMME OF THE *FRONT NATIONAL***

On the eve of the 21st Century, France faces four major challenges, which are together the source of its melancholy. The first is globalization, which is often blamed, for the erosion of France's culture and its depressingly high levels of unemployment.<sup>49</sup> The Front National's policies have appealed to a sizeable proportion of the French electorate. Over the time, the party has broadened its policy profile to counter the view that it is a single-issue movement and has tried to pose as a credible party for a government. Furthermore, as it moved from splinter or a small group status to a mass political party, it felt the need to fine tune its programme appropriately. FN aims to spread its ideological net.<sup>50</sup>

The question: In French election studies, a central debate concerns the French voter's standing decision - is it party or ideology?- attracts considerable attention of the political observers.

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<sup>49</sup> Dominique Moisi, "Chirac of France: A New Leader of the West?", *Foreign Affairs*, vol.74, no.6, Nov-Dec.1993, pp.94-95.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Hainsworth and Paul Mitchell, "France: The Front National from Crossroads to Crossroads", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.53, n.1, 2000. p.446.

Both party identification and left - right ideological identification are shown to be widely held, with the latter more so. Their relative structural effects are found to depend heavily on the dynamics of the dual ballot. Party is more important for electoral choice on the first ballot, while ideology is more important on the second. This finding, demonstrated in fully specified logistic regression models of the presidential vote, seems also to inhere in the logic of French electoral institution.<sup>51</sup>

Voters arrive at the polling booth with sentiments, preconceptions and preferences that they held over time. These beliefs and attitudes distill into what V.O.Key called a standing decision a predisposition to vote for certain parties and candidates. "Ideology is what anchors the French voter...(left or right) is their primary tool for deciding among the parties indeed ideological identity appears generally to serve as the French voter's compass. Ideology, not party is the premier psychological anchor of the French voter".<sup>52</sup>

*Anti-Communism* was a strong party line as long as communism remained prevalent at home and abroad. The decline of the French Communist Party made this policy increasingly redundant. Though it was not a vote winner, it attracted a small number of supporters who were against the abolition of private property and state ownership of the means of production. However, the increasing unemployment, failure the of government to understand

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<sup>51</sup> Michael S. Lewis-Beck and Kevin Chlarsou, "Party-ideology, Institutions and the 1995 French Presidential Election", *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.32, no.3, July 2002, p.489.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.489.



people's needs and insecurity provided the party with a number of attractive policy issues in the 1980s.<sup>53</sup> Whilst anti-Communism was a major, motivating philosophy in the party's earlier years (roughly from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s), by this time, anyway, immigration, insecurity, unemployment and (national) identity themes became more prominent in the 1980s and anti-globalisation themes in the 1990s.

"We are the people against the Establishment"<sup>54</sup>, runs the heading of one of the sections in *Militer au Front*, a manual for FN activities. It denounces the oligarchies of the main political parties and claims that France is undergoing a crisis of values and identity, aimed as host of urgent social, economic and political problems. The blame for this state of affairs is placed squarely on "*la bandes des quatre*": the Parti Socialiste(PS), the Party Communiste Francaise (PCF), the Central-right Union Pour la Republique (RPR).

The *Front National* asserts that it wants to return power to the French people and set up a real democracy where people could express themselves directly through referendums that they could also initiate. Thus, although the FN professes to differ from the old extreme right because it accepts democratic, republican principles its vilification of the mainstream parties provided a substitute for the extreme right's traditional distrust of parliamentary democracy as such. The denunciation of these groups some time echo the

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<sup>53</sup> Harnsworth, n.l, 2000, p.444.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Flood, "National Populism" in Christopher Flood and Lawrence Bell (eds.), *Political Ideas in Contemporary France* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1997), p.108.

extreme rights eternal obsession with Jews who exercise a hidden control over the levers of power.

*Anti-Semitism* has a long and deep tradition in France, surfacing most notably in the response to German overlordship during the Second World War.<sup>55</sup> Anti-Semitism has been an undercurrent in Le Pen's media interviews and is more explicit at rallies and in speeches by other FN leaders. Hatred against Jews and immigrants in the message underpinning Le Pen's demand for 'France for French'. Romain Marie, a FN Euro - MP criticised "the tendency of Jews to monopolise the highest positions in Western nations". He added: "the modern world is experiencing a new intrusion of the Jewish phenomenon... Marx and Roths child are by the way of being two sides of the same coin".<sup>56</sup> A few Jewish or Masonic association, which have their own lobbies in the Government; are denounced as a threat to national interest. As in the past, the enemy within is linked to an enemy without. These lobbies and interest groups are seen to be locked into the emergent global system of political states and the European Union as its Trojan Horse.

Globalisation emerged in the 1990s as the particular target of the FN leadership. The emergence of the United States in the 1990s as the only surviving superpower was greeted with great ambivalence. It led to a *dislike*

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<sup>55</sup> Cathie Lloyd and Hazel Waters, "France: One Culture, One People?", *Race and Class* (London), vol. 32, no.3, 1991, p.63.

<sup>56</sup> Harris, n.6, p.73.

*for Amercian Society* which was multi-ethnic and encouraged consumerism and a debase mass culture. The American system of globalisation and US trade retaliation against European products resonated strongly with FN as well as other parties. The French always seem to be opposing the United States on some issue or other, whether it is in the realm of international diplomacy, where between the lines of France's carefully worded diplomatic statements one can discern a distinct distaste for America's oft-proclaimed sole-superpower status, or on matters of culture, where France is always the first to denounce American "cultural imperialism."<sup>57</sup>

Some scholars think that, the far right is similar to some on the left in rejecting globalisation. This is fundamentally mistaken. The great majority of leftist demonstrators on globalization want more international investment, fairer trade and tougher multinational agreements on the environment. The far right by contrast rails against the reality of an interdependent world with its increased mobility and multination decision-making. It offers voters the delusion that modern reality will go away if they pull over their heads a comfort blanket of national chauvinism. Its ideology is rooted in the nation's past and is irrelevant to the modern world.<sup>58</sup> *Anti – Globalisation* was followed by the party as it was regarded as the most serious threat to French national identity, destroying nations and cultures, differences and frontiers. In the 1980s, Le Pen fretted about France's borders . He won the

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<sup>57</sup> Moisi, n.6, p.94.

<sup>58</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 26 April 2002.

support by linking domestic economic insecurities to threats from abroad. In the 1990s, he switched his targets from immigrants to globalisation. The fear of immigrants was easily translated into fear of foreign goods, labour and capital.<sup>59</sup> The Front argued that since peoples were different, they should be treated differently. Globalisation, multi-culturalism, 'Brussels' and other trans- or supra-national forces eroded the integrity of nationals.<sup>60</sup>

But this is not to say that the party has been hostile to all forms of European integration. On the economic and defence front, Le Pen has been using the European Union (EU) as a buffer. As a number of Euro skeptical groups have started praising EU as France's only realistic alternative to American-led globalisation, Le Pen has been forced to shift sides.<sup>61</sup> In the area of defence, the FN distinguishes itself from other parties by its apparent enthusiasm for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Le Pen shown that he is prepared to break with the Gaullist tradition of foreign policy and to reintegrate the French forces in NATO military command structure. He also integrates the pro-European thinking of new right into his view of a strong Europe, obviously white Europe, confronting the Soviet Union.<sup>62</sup>

However, as the self-proclaimed defender of identities, it perpetrates to stand for a European Europe, just as it does for a French France. Its intellectuals

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<sup>59</sup> Sophic Meunir, "The French Exception", *Foreign Affairs* (New York), Vol.79, no.4, July - August 2000, p.110.

<sup>60</sup> Hainsworth, n.1, p.445.

<sup>61</sup> Meunir, n.4, p.114.

<sup>62</sup> Harris, n.6, p.81.

have persistently expounded the nobility of the common European heritage of culture and civilization with France as its epitome. In spite of these moves, the party has always claimed that the super-nationalist concept which underlies the progressive integration of what has now become the European Union is unacceptable in Principle and damaging its practice. Part of the complaint against the EU centers on the claim that it aims not only to abolish internal frontiers but also to abandon meaningful external frontiers as well. FN publicists preached against the General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT) agreement on the ground that no state or group of states should have international free trade imposed on it against its interests.<sup>63</sup>

Just as FN wants to protect French products and services, *protection from immigrant competition* is called for by the FN. As a single issue movement, it is portrayed as rallying support around the theme of immigration. In France, the term 'immigrants', is used to describe widely differing population which in 1991 totaled around four and a half million people out of a population of approximately fifty six million. This included people from various European countries – particularly Portugal, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Poland and Yugoslavia; asylum seekers from East Asia, South America and Middle East; large communities of Algerians, Moroccans and Tunisians whose presence is linked with France's colonial history.

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<sup>63</sup> Flood, n.2, pp.132-3.

The Front National's constant refrain is that immigrants are a major cause of unemployment among native French population as they act as rivals for jobs. They are even targeted to increasing crime, civil unrest, urban decay, deterioration of schools, alien religions and cultural practices. According to FN, the presence of sympathetic interest groups in the establishment has benefited the immigrants. They get an access to state benefits and services which are denied to the native French people. This is regarded as the positive discrimination in favour of immigrants where negative discrimination against the French population.<sup>64</sup> Le Pen talks about "internment camps" or "transit camps" for illegal immigrants and "special trains" to carry them out of France.

The Front's somewhat crude initial scapegoat of immigrants was refined in the mid-1980s, as it tried to soften its image and broaden its electoral base. Promotion of ideas and personalities. Spearheaded by Megret and other key ideologues, these elements were in the vanguard... 'the national preference'. Firmly embedded in the Megret-inspired and extensive 1993 party programme, this meant supporting French and the European Union nationals primarily (as opposed to immigrants and other foreigners) in matters of unemployment, housing or other state benefits.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp.117-8.

<sup>65</sup> Hainsworth, n.1, p.444.

And hence, Le Pen goes a step ahead in the issue of immigration when he discriminates between *the European and non-European immigrants* – mostly black Muslims from countries of North Africa and Turkey. They are presented as a significant threat to French identity and are made scapegoats as the sources and bearers of all evils. Islam, the religion practiced by most of these immigrants, is the second religion in France, the size of the Muslim community is constantly increasing, mosques and Koranic schools are proliferating. According to FN, Islam is double-faced – tolerant when it is not in a position of strength, but intolerant and aggressive when it is in an expansionist period. It adds that Islam has a theoretic, totalitarian world view which bases the political and personal spheres on the religion, consequently making it incompatible with European culture.<sup>66</sup>

Again, by the provocative handling of the *issues of AIDS and homosexuality*, he poses as a defender of moral order. He denounces homosexuality linking it to the problem of immigrants. According to him, at a time, when immigrants and the ‘Third World’ are ‘over bleeding’, he argues that homosexuality could bring France to the ‘end of the world’, In his handling of the issue of AIDS, he claimed that people carrying AIDS virus should be isolated from the rest of the society in ‘sedatoriums’ as, in his view, condoms were an ineffective protection against the virus. *Abortion* is another issue which enables him to blame the establishment for

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<sup>66</sup> Flood, n.2, p.118

the 'moral decline' of the country. He proposes to stop social security for abortions.

The Front's economic policy and the espousal of protectionism in the 1990s also attracted much attention. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the party had boasted to be neo-liberal, even 'Reaganite', in its economics.... An examination of the Front's economic thinking over the years actually reveals an elastic ideological practice, with emphasis on economic liberalism and/or protectionism whenever it suited the party politically.<sup>67</sup>

The emphasis on style and voter-oriented approaches divert attention from the fact the extreme right family of parties does have a common core doctrine. This is nationalism – which is often expressed through a demonisation of the 'Other' as much as by a precise definition of the sacred homeland.<sup>68</sup> For Le Pen's *National Front* party, Joan of Arc, the 15<sup>th</sup> Century peasant girl who led a series of victories against the English is the national heroine and a symbol of French resistance against foreign 'invaders'.

There are various ideological forms of nationalism, but it is useful to separate 'liberal' from 'holistic' nationalism. Liberalism is modern – it is rationalistic, individualistic, pluralistic and concerned with tolerance and rights. Holistic nationalism is not. It is often based on an ethnic conception

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<sup>67</sup> Hainsworth, n.1, pp.445-46.

<sup>68</sup> Rogers, no.5, p.412.



of the nation, although it can encompass a static form in which assimilation into the 'home' culture is acceptable. Holistic nationalism thus stresses conversion, expulsion or worse of the 'Other' and the defence of a traditional conception of community.<sup>69</sup>

Since the concept of national preference was central to the Front's policy profile, it attracted much attention – a fair deal of support on the one hand and considerable condemnation on the other. The Front's policies have appealed to a sizeable proportion of the French electorate. Over time, too, the party has broadened its policy profile, in part to try to counter the suggestion that it is a single-issue (immigration) movement, but also in order to pose as a credible candidate for government. It felt the need to fine tune.

The official programme of the *Front National* is more opportunistic in nature than a coherent programme. It singles out particular group as instruments of damage to nation's identity, cohesion and material well-being. By performing a balancing act between the need to highlight the party's difference from the Right. It satisfies a hard core of neo-fascists and protects the party from losing too many moderate votes.

## CONCLUSION

In the early years of 1980s the Front stood very much at the crossroads: voters and members were sparse, and the fragmentation and internal divisions were common place. In fact, it was close to collapse and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., no.5, p.413.

unsurprisingly the political commentators were writing of the French extreme right as a viable force. However, the system of proportional representation in the 1986 European and national election came as a boon in disguise. This factor coupled with Le Pen's charismatic leadership reinvigorated its political life and considered it. From then, its electoral success was seen as the revelation of a developing crisis for the French society and its political system.

With the increasing in the number of industries the demand for cheap labour became acute. The immigrants mostly from Africa thus became the competitors of the French jobs. These immigrants, whose religion and culture was completely different from that of the natives of France, became the main targets of the *Front National*. Thus, the party gained majority support in areas with immigration population.

Thus, the rise of the FN since early 1980s has been due to economic, political as well as social causes. During its early days, the party attracted supporters from the Conservatives who were *pied noirs*, in other words, those who returned to France after Algeria freed itself from the French rule. With the development of industries and with the rise of immigration to France, economics played a major role. The urban youths, which faced competition from the immigrant labour for the jobs, became the main supporters of FN. They are pure whites (*Petits blancs*) of lower middle class origin who have ambition for upward mobility but feel threatened by the

presence of immigrants whom they hold responsible for everything that is no right. Thus, the people, who live in daily fear of the “devilish” immigrants express their anger and resentment by voting for FN. This protest vote has been acting as a message to the government and therefore the overall support for it is unstable.

Widespread disillusionment with the European idea, recession and unemployment do provide the kind of atmosphere of insecurity in which the extreme right thrives. Condemnations by the establishment, highly published gaffes and defection, court decisions and statements by leaders have not so far seriously weakened Le Pen’s electoral strength.

Thus reduced to a weak movement presently, what will happen in the future remain extremely unpredictable. What Le Pen represents cannot be washed away or dismissed as a passing fashion. Le Pen responds to the national crisis and that is where his strength lies. As Jean Pierre Chevenmen put it: “He represents the feeling of a relative decline, unfortunately all too real”.

## **CHAPTER II**

# **THE FRONT NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

“This is a very dangerous development which the European leaders and democracies must curb and control without dilly – dallying”.

- Wilhelm Heitmeyer.

Since the turn of the new millennium, extreme right parties have been the subject of considerable concern.<sup>1</sup> The revival of extreme Right wing parties in West Europe has attracted considerable attention from political scientists and political sociologists. Politics is on the decline in Western-style democracies. A political vacuum is being created, and it is filled by far Right groups such as that of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

## **RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT-WING PARTIES IN WESTERN EUROPE**

The rise of the extreme Right is not confined to France. The extreme Right is on the move across Europe. Since 1789 the Far Right has been an important actor in French political life. The extreme Right parties of Europe have been a subject of considerable attention in recent years. But the entry into the government of the Austrian Freedom Party was perceived as a threat to the democracy throughout world and brought back the dreaded memories of the fascist regimes of Benitto Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. In contrast to the defeat of Germany by the Allies, which ended the Second World War and had eliminated the fascists, these movements grew slowly and gained support of the people. Widely know as ‘racial’, ‘neo-Nazi’,

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Eatwell, “ the Birth of Extreme Right in Western Europe?”, *Parliamentary Affairs* (Liverpool), vol.53 (2000), p.407.

'fascist', these extreme politics do not hesitate to call themselves 'nationalist', 'populist' and 'anti-immigrant'.

In the post-war period, European countries remained more or less socially peaceful entities mostly under the moderate governments. But the rise of the extreme Right parties at the end of the twentieth century and had considerably disturbed that social peril. During the mid-1980s, a number of extreme Right parties within Western Europe achieved notable electoral success. The *National Front* (FN) led by Jean-Marie Le Pen of France was one among them. The *Front National* has stabilised its electoral support to 15 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

Then the re-emergence of the Italian neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) and the birth of the German Republikaner. More recently, the rash has spread like wildfire as new parties that dance in the limbo between the Fascist Left and the Far Right proceed by saltation from candidates to council chamber, from coalition to Cabinet. Such parties have been established components of the governments the Austrian and Italy, while their merely xenophobic stepbrothers serve in the Netherlands and set the asylum and immigration agenda in Denmark, Belgium and Switzerland. In Italy, Gianfranco Fini, leader of the Alleanza Nazionale, the direct successor of the MSI, serves Deputy Prime Minister, while in this year's presidential election in France Le Pen finished second behind Jacques Chirac.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vol.53, pp.11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Glyn Ford, "The Emerging Far Right", *Frontline* (Chennai), 31 January 2002, p.63.

The *Front National* in France had broadened its appeal by forging electoral links with the conservative. The National Front in Britain, the pioneer of anti-immigration politics, was formed as an amalgamation of fascists and conservative racists. The National Alliance of Italy had captured 14 per cent of the votes and had five ministers in the New Centre Right coalition government. However, the entry of the Austrian Freedom Party into its national government gained utmost attention. The leader of these parties who shared a very particular vision of New Europe based on racial exclusivity rather than democratic citizenship and for the first time making their mark through ballot boxes and not just through violence.

Western observers seemed stunned when in June 1984, in a democratic country like France, in an entirely free election, the candidates of the xenophobic *Front National* (FN) captured more one-tenth of the poll or, to be precise, 11.06 per cent of the votes cast in the election to the European Parliament.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of the 1990s, Europe was social democratic and the European Union was at pains to find the right balance between productivity, keeping the competitive edge in a market economy and social issues such as a redistribution of wealth to even out the imbalances in society. Today, there is a district veering to the right. Social Democrats have lost in Italy, Austria,

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Singer, "The Resistible Rise of Jean Marie Le Pen", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 1991, p.367.

Spain and Denmark, while Britain's Tony Blair and his New Labour can hardly be held up as a model of left wing policies.<sup>5</sup>

There is widespread anxiety in European nation-states centered around identity and this is linked with the integration of "Europe". Nebulous appeals to unite as "Europeans" do not find resource in disinherited and disinterested pockets of urban decay where the nationalistic appeal is still vibrant. When French and British voters were asked why they voted far right, many disavowed racist views but said that they acknowledged that there was a problem and expressed respect for politicians who actually speak their mind.<sup>6</sup>

The main distinctive features of the socio-economic policy of such parties are the belief that the fruits of the national economy should first and foremost benefit their own people ('national preference' in the language of the French *Front National*).<sup>7</sup> Le Pen seems to be working to a strategy and has several weapons up his sleeve, based on ultra-nationalism and hostility to the rising power of the EU. A full explanation of the successes and failure of extreme right parties requires a strong national perspective.

While the presence of an extreme right movement is by no means unique to France, the French case is of particular interest because of the remarkable electoral achievements of the *Front National* and its links with the bitter

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<sup>5</sup> Vaiju Naravane, "Europe's Right Turn", *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.58.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hindley, "Anxious in Europe", *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.60.

<sup>7</sup> Eatwell, n.1, p.413.



legacies of Vichy. And what is alarming about Le Pen's performance is that it seems to mirror the general trend in Europe of extreme right and fascist forces gaining prominence in the political mainstream, the Vlaams Blok in Belgium, the Freedom Party in Austria and far-right groups and parties in Italy and Denmark have all made electoral headway by tapping into and exploiting a well-spring of anti-immigration sentiment.<sup>8</sup>

## **THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY AND EXTREME RIGHT-WING PARTIES**

The historical conditions surrounding the emergence and creation of a European Community in the aftermath of the Second World War – and thus mandated in part to secure democratic governments in Europe and uphold liberal democratic values of freedom, equality and tolerance – explain in part the European Union's particular unease with far Right politics.<sup>9</sup>

As the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, representatives from the twelve nation states of the European Community gathered in Maastricht in the Netherlands to negotiate the Treaty on the European Union. This treaty promised to deepen economic and political integration; its preamble resolved "to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the people of Europe, in which decision are taken as closely as possible to the citizen". While all twelve nations ratified the treaty, some did so only with great difficulty. The French and Danish were deeply divided. The former

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<sup>8</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi), 24 April 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Fieschi, "European Institutions: The Far-Right and Illiberal Politics In a Liberal Context", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.53, 2000, p.517.

barely approved their referendum (by 50.7 per cent), and the later required a second one after the first failed. The unexpected difficulty in garnering adequate support suggested that the resolve to create “an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe” lay more with the drafters of the treaty than with the peoples themselves.<sup>10</sup>

In assessing extreme right electoral progress, it is important to note that these results are gained in multi-party systems, and that extremist parties can attract much higher votes in some areas.<sup>11</sup> Evidently, local conditions, contributing to the rise of their extremists differ from country to country. But there are however, some common factors, within Europe, their appears increasingly to be a chasm separating the governed and the governing. The changes brought by European integration have left large number of people bewildered and unable to cope. In several countries of the EU, people feel that their own state has become a mere puppet whose strings are pulled by faceless bureaucrats in Brussels, where the EU head quarters is situated.

Le Pen's movement is obsessed by “threats” to France, and in recent times it has placed special emphasis on the ‘dangers’ of European integration. It believes in a “French France in a European Europe” and in recent years has campaigned against both the Maastricht and the Euro. It wants the EU members to develop a common policy in the field of

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<sup>10</sup> Sara De Master and Michael k. Le Roy, “Xenophobia and European Union”, *Comparative Politics* (New York), vol. 32, no.4, July 2000, p.419.

<sup>11</sup> Eatwell, no.1, p.407.

economic integration (free trade); police (to fight against criminality, drug, immigration); defence (a European army necessary in the future against the Islamic countries) and external affairs. But, it is not favour of the European Union as it is now exists, as a “Union of States”.

They were deeply hostile to the European Union, whose increasing assumption of sovereignty was embodied in the Euro currency notes that replaced the French franc. Le Pen shrewdly shifted his rhetoric from the evils of immigrants to the of the Euro, which he calls “the currency of occupation”. The fringe also agreed on the threat of globalisation to the French economy. Even though the economy has performed relatively well and French multinationals are thriving.<sup>12</sup>

The debate on globalisation has spilled over and has affected French relationship with Europe. The FN has never supported the idea that France should become a component of a fully federated European super state. Pleading to end what he call a “decadent and corrupt system”, he has compared the European Union with the late USSR and predicts that France may disappear under the weight of immigration.<sup>13</sup> In two key appearances on drive-time radio during a campaign, Le Pen used a contemptuous and needling frame of reference for the United States. France had to get out of the European Union, he said, because if it didn't, it would drown in a monstrous, expanded Europe and wind up “a Kansas or an Oklahoma”.

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<sup>12</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 24 April 2002.

<sup>13</sup> *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), 24 April 2002.

This Europe, Le Pen went on, would have “no diplomacy except that of the United States”.<sup>14</sup>

Europe has moved to the Right. People have finally understood that the lax approach of the Left, soft on crime and delinquency, has lead them to the brink of a catastrophe. Immigration is a problem. There is a clash of cultures.<sup>15</sup> These are not limited to France. The first is immigration. France has 5-6 million Muslim residents. The national unemployment rate is high and immigrants compete for jobs. The same phenomena are seen across Europe from Britain to the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Austria.<sup>16</sup> But, Le Pen does not treat all the immigration equally. On the other hand, he makes a distinction between the European and non-European immigrants.

## **MIGRATION POLICY**

Migration is one of the most serious problems confronting Europe since the end of the Cold War. The heightened restrictionism of governments of member states of the European Union in the 1990s is reflective of the common fear that "over foreignization" jeopardizes cultural and racial homogeneity and endangers European identity and solidarity.<sup>17</sup> Europe has witnessed growing politicization of issues surrounding immigration and the

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<sup>14</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 3 May 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Vaiju Naravane, “Europe’s Right Turn”, *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.57.

<sup>16</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 9 May 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Rajendra K. Jain, “Fortifying the Fortress: Immigration and Politics in the European Union”, *International Studies*, vol.34, no.17, April-June 1997, p.163.

growth of xenophobia and a resurgence of right-wing extremist parties thriving on anti-immigrant platforms.<sup>18</sup>

The two principal host countries are Germany and France. These two countries also have the highest proportions of non-European Community foreign workers in relation to their labour force.<sup>19</sup> Faster economic growth in Europe was the main reason behind the hiring. Fast-growing French industries, such as telecommunications and computers, were busily hiring, while government incentives, including youth-jobs program and a shorter workweek, were also playing a part.

France has absorbed outsiders more readily than any other country in Europe over the past two centuries. In the last few years French hospitality has been strained: France, like much of Europe, has been plagued by unemployment. Although Muslims have been disproportionately victims, the *Front National* blames them for France's economic ills.

The immigrants, particularly the Muslims, face the swelling of anti-Islamism in Europe. The Europe is certainly nothing new: Muslims have been living in and travelling throughout the geographical region for thousand of years. However, due to often widely constructed image of Islam, elaborated and amplified historically in order to inspire Christian crusades, to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., n.17, p.165.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. n.17, p.165

legitimate local examinations and generally to convince the Europeans of their moral superiority, the Europeans have come to take it for granted that there is a wide and unbridgeable gulf between two distinct 'worlds' which are poised to feud forever.

Currently, there are about 23 million Muslims in Europe as a whole, just over 3.5 per cent of its total population.<sup>20</sup> They face a mass upsurge in xenophobic hostility and violence, a tightening of immigration restrictions which related to expanding racist and culturalist assumptions, widespread unemployment fear of persecution.

In France Jean-Marie Le Pen leads *Le Front National* which calls for a halt to the 'Islamisation' of France; in Germany Franz Schonhuber, leader of the right-wing Republikaner Party, declares, "Never will the green flag of Islam fly over Germany" and Progressive Party of "Denmark campaigns with a promise of 'Denmark with no Musselmen'".<sup>21</sup>

The other major incident concerning immigration was the "headscarves affair" which blew up in October 1989 when three Muslim girls, two Moroccan and one Tunisian, in a public-sector school in Creil refused to remove their chadors during classes and were there upon excluded from the school by the head teacher. The incident caused national and international controversy, attracting long accounts in news papers across Western

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<sup>20</sup> Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach, "Introduction: Islam in Europe and Politics of Religion and Community" in Steven Vertovec and Ceri Peach (eds.), *Islam in Europe: The Politics of Religion and Community* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), p.13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.5.

Europe.<sup>22</sup> Although the “headscarves affair” eventually resolved itself, in part through the intervention of the king of Morocco, it evoked a reprise of all the debates and discussions of the early and mid-1980s about the concept of French identity.<sup>23</sup>

By the early 1970s, the oil shock, economic recession and rising unemployment coupled with the rise of xenophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments led Western Europe to shut its door on immigrants.<sup>24</sup> The Commission has played an important role with its various communications on immigration over the years. However, thus far, the Union has not come up with a “coherent immigration policy”.<sup>25</sup> Under EC law, European immigrants have far more rights than those their Third World counterparts. Thus, when France closed her doors to further immigration in 1974, EC nationals were necessarily exempted.<sup>26</sup>

As once relatively homogenous states in Europe like Germany, France and Holland find their character being transformed. European elites have consistently pursued policies of exclusion and peripheralization of immigrant groups as part of “a survival strategy by states which feels subjectively threatened by the potential emergence of a new ethnicity related to immigrant population in the political life”. There exists a large consensus

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<sup>22</sup> Christopher T. Husbands, “The Mainstream Right and Politics of Immigration in France: Major Developments in the 1980s”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.14, no.2, 1991, p.191.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, n.2, p.192.

<sup>24</sup> Rajendra K. Jain, no.17, p.164.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, n.17, p.173.

<sup>26</sup> Alec G. Hargrieves, “The Political Mobilisation of the North African Immigration Community in France”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 1991, p.354.

between various political parties to keep the threat, that is, immigrants and their descendants as communities outside, or at the margins of the polity.<sup>27</sup>

Some countries of immigration make it very difficult for immigrants to become citizens, others grant citizenship but only at the price of cultural assimilation, while a third group makes it possible for immigrants to become citizens while maintaining distinct cultural identities. In France immigration can, in theory, lead to eventual naturalization (based largely on the *jus soli*). In France only French nationals have full citizenship.<sup>28</sup>

In 1995, France Plus suffered a serious setback when the *Front National* – calling for the expulsion of immigrants to reduce French unemployment – won 15 per cent of the vote in the presidential election. More directly threatening, National Front candidates won 1,000 seats in local assemblies and become mayor in three major cities.<sup>29</sup> The jobs last less long than they once did and that this is a bad thing. The alleged decline in job tenure is usually blamed on three factors: globalisation, technological change and labour market deregulation. There is a pervasive feeling that France has lost standing as a model of society, and lost political influence within the EU, as well as on a world scene more than ever dominated by an unpredictable United States.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Rajendra K. Jain, no.17, p.177.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., n.17, p.177.

<sup>29</sup> Milton Virost, "Muslims in France", *Foreign Affairs*, vol.75, no.5, 1996, p.92.

<sup>30</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 16 April 2002.



In France and across the European Union, accelerated immigration of culturally and “racially” different peoples is proving deeply disturbing. Immigration is also an issue in the United States, but America has historically handled immigration differently. The difference is crucial to national futures and policies. “Different” does not imply better or worse. The United States receives significant benefits from its immigrants, but many European view as a cost.<sup>31</sup>

Most European nations want to maintain their traditional cultures; the American tradition is one of change itself. America assimilates immigrants while also assimilating their cultures and thus changing its own. As is frequently pointed out for example, Mexicans can go back and forth to their homeland with relative ease. Whereas in Europe, technology, economics and war have caused major changes, but in France, Italy, Spain, Britain, even Germany the cultural continuity is clear. Europeans are rightly proud of their cultural heritages.<sup>32</sup>

In 1998, The European Commission urged governments to take a more active approach to reduce unemployment, and the then Commission President, Jacques Santer, threw his weight behind a French proposal to create jobs by floating an international bond issue that would be used for finance major public works.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 25 April 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25 April 2002.

The European Union leaders stepped up their fight against illegal immigration on 22 June, 2000 but stopped short of imposing economic sanctions on countries that failed to help control migration flows.<sup>33</sup>

In the June 1999 elections the French *Front National* and the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Osterreichs*) each acquired five seats, the Italian National Alliance (*Alleanza Nazionale*) nine seats, the Northern League (*Lega Nord*) four seats, the Belgian Flemish Block (*Vlaams Blok*) two, and finally the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) a single seat, Far-right MEPs make up just over 4 per cent of the European Parliament's composition. With 26 MEPs in all (out of 626 seats) the far-right is thus the smallest of ideological clusters (the united left) is nearly twice as well represented. Such figures seems far from alarming. why are these parties with their 4 per cent of seats of interest in the European context?

Of more interest in terms of political analysis is that the presence of the far right in European Union politics can also be taken to reveal the dramatic - and often unresolved - tensions introduced by its politics and politicians in liberal democratic contexts. Thus the interest lies not in the number of seats it commands in the European Parliament, but in the nature of its relationship with European institutions. Further, the presence of such parties in the European Parliament reveals not only the dilemma of the far right in its attitude to democratic institutions, but, also the dilemma which mainstream

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<sup>33</sup> *Indian Express* (Chennai), 23 June 2002.

right parties and parliamentary groups in the European Parliament face given their own attitudes towards the far right and towards Europe.

Of primary interest are the attitudes of far right parties to the European Union and to the European Parliament in particular. The strident anti-Europeanism of the French *Front National* MEPs, for example, contrasts sharply with the pro-European stance of the MEPs of the Italian National Alliance or the Northern League. The first set of questions therefore addresses the manner in which these parties view the European arena and how they interpret their political role within it given divergent stances on the desirability and value of the Union's institutions. Many parties have used their European electoral achievements as a way to enhance their domestic fortunes despite their anti-European attitude.

Far-right parties represented in the European Parliament harbour a range of attitudes towards the European Union, as do the other parties, while the Danish People's Party, the French *Front National*, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Flemish Block are all anti-European, the Italian National Alliance and the Northern League offer the peculiarity for nationalist parties of being, cosmetically at least, pro-European. The anti-European attitudes of the first four are comparable, despite differing national contexts, indeed they are remarkably similar. Their shared commitment to an ultra-nationalist doctrine precludes their allegiance to any institutional arrangement dedicated to furthering supranational or even international forms of

government. Whether they be classified as fascist, neo-fascist populist or national populist, each of these parties in the commitment to defend - above all else-a version of the national interest rooted in the cultural (and often racial) homogeneity of the nation.

The Austrian Freedom Party, the Flemish Block, the *Front National* and the Danish People's Party share a very similar stance toward Europe: Europe is intrusive, it threatens national independence its bureaucracy hinders national development, it smacks of a cosmopolitanism (in far-right vocabulary this is often a euphemism for Jewish) which undermines national culture, heritage and identity. Looking at European election material, one is struck by their similarity calls for a Europe of the Fatherlands and for the preservation of a unique mosaïque of European identities in the face of a homogenising, soulless Brussels. such views of the national interest render any allegiance to the European Union's supra-national purpose impossible.

The parties perceive Europe as a potential fortress against immigration and Europe as a cultural entity. Le Pen's statements concerning the threats any of Europe as well as the leader in a community of European nations which share a civilization shows an attempt to a European patriotism and link the destiny of the French nation with that of a Europe of the Fatherlands defined by ethnic and cultural boundaries.

Despite their anti-Europeanism, they have won seats in the European Parliament. Moreover, European elections have afforded them a measure of

success which some domestic electoral systems precluded. The French *National Front* as a case in point. Its electoral breakthrough can be traced back to 1984 when it gained ten seats in the European Parliament. Despite its hostility to Europe, exposure through Europe was not to be scorned.

As far as the pro-European stance is concerned, the parties would not have survived as a party at the national or at the European level if it had adopted an anti-European position. Anti-Europeanism is not a tenable stance. French *Front National*, declares its concern for a social European and condemns the stridently capitalistic aspects of European integration.

The most important element to retain here is that, regardless of their attitude toward European institutions, nationalism (or regionalism couched in nationalist terms) is these parties' defining aspect. It structures their relationship to Europe and to the European Parliament in particular. It is this nationalism which is responsible for the acuteness of their dilemma with regards to the European Union. Further, their nationalism governs their behaviour within the European Parliament and explains in great measure their failure to become a pan - European force genuinely embodied , for example in a parliamentary group.

Their relationships within the European Parliament immediately after the 1984 election to the European Parliament reflects in forming of the members of the French *Front National* the Italian MSI and the Greek National Political Union (EPEN) formed an inter parliamentary group. Because of

there inability to work together, from 1994 onwards, the alliances between the groups remained precarious and the MEPs were affiliated for the most part to the 'non- attached' group in the 1999 the French *Front National* set up a technical group (i.e. with out political affinity) with Emma Bonino and the Italian Radical Party. The fact that it was a 'technical' and not a political group, however posed problems, and its legitimacy was called into question by other groups since parliamentary rules now require groups to have political affinities.

This takes us to the subject of the attitude of the European Parliament and European institutions towards parties of the far-right. It can be argued that the major Parliamentary groups exhibit a form of consociational politics with respect to far-right parties; that is a capacity to reach elite level agreements on the issue of far-right politics despite a diversity of views on a range of other issue, in this respect the attitude of the Parliament and the major groups successful cooperation in hocking the Far Right's organisational capacity within it could be interpreted as a form of consociation politics. On the other hand, it is arguable that intergovernmental concerns still play a disproportionate role within the European Union institutions, thus limiting thus limiting severely the European Union's scope for intervention as unified international political actor.

Those less comfortable with the European Union's decision to intervene in what was considered a domestic matter were countries (Denmark excepted) which have had fewer problems with the politics of the far-right at home and also, coincidentally, those for whom the European Union remains something less of a community of nations, given their countries commitment to the safeguarding of national sovereignty and more traditional conceptions of the national interest.

Some authors, largely those in the realists or intergovernmentalist camp, have argued that the European Union should simply be ignored as an international player because it does not exhibit the characteristics of a state: it is a forum in which governments meet periodically in order to facilitate relations and exchanges. Others agree that supranational bodies enhance the potential for cooperation and their will to cooperate rests ultimately with individual states.

The far-right ideological forms may be resilient over time but, the three parties which experienced the most electoral success in the late 1980s and early 1990s did not do well in the 1999 elections the French *Front National* and the Italian National Alliance lost more than half of their seats in the Parliament and the Italian Northern League lost half of their seats. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons accounting for this decline. Those elections in which the parties did very well (such as those of 1994) may exhibit particularities: It can be argued that the 1994 election was likely to

be particularly propitious for all anti-European parties-such the French *Front National* - in the immediate aftermath of the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht. In the case of the Italian National Alliance, the 1994 elections occurred in the wake of corruption scandals and can be thought of as understandable clement to parties that could be seen to have 'kept their hands clean', such as the National Alliance and Northern League. However, the internal and domestic situations for these parties in 1999 might just as aptly explain a poor showing in the 1999 election: the National Front's decline in the European arena is a direct consequence of its internal strife and the roll taken by French political institutions on parties on either extreme of the political spectrum.

This takes us back to our first conclusion: though the fortunes of far-right parties in the European Parliament are in part dependent on how they fare domestically, their decline in a European Parliament should also perhaps, be understood as the result of the organisational pressures, exerted by parliamentary politics which prompts these parties to adapt, seek alliance partners (as exemplified by the National Alliance) or face decline and sometimes extinction. The latter might only be avoided at the cost of transformations which may profoundly affect the party's ideological identity. On the other hand, rather than a constraint, the European Parliament can also be seen as an opportunity to initiate transformations within a political arena whose ideological boundaries are more fluid than domestic ones.



The 2002 presidential election success of Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the far right *National Front* shocked, and the launch of the right in a key member of the European Union caused deep consternation in EU capitals.<sup>34</sup> European leaders found that “some 40 per cent of the French voted for candidates deeply hostile to the European Union...half of the voters went to anti-globalization candidates”.<sup>35</sup> And that one French adult in every five had voted for the xenophobic leader of the FN was really shocking.

Thus apathy in France, notably among the young, is getting dangerously close to the levels it has reached in some other modern democracies.<sup>36</sup> Le Pen’s party presented itself as the sole alternative to the failed governments of right and left, denouncing a political elite mired in corruption and bent on ‘dissolving France in the Europe of Maastricht’. Central to its manifesto was the ‘principal of national preference’.<sup>37</sup>

Political parties from across the board called on voters to stop the advance of the *Front National*, which has promised French withdrawal from the E.U., “internment camp” for clandestine immigrants, the progressive abolition of income tax and the reinstatement of capital punishment.<sup>38</sup> Sixty-six per cent of the French population thought that there were “far too many

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<sup>34</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 23 April 2002.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Arnauld Meguet, “The French Election of 2002”, *West European Politics*, vol.25, no.4, October 2002, p.211.

<sup>37</sup> James G. Shield, “Europe’s other Landslide: The French National Assembly Elections of May-June 1997”, *Political Quarterly*, vol.68, no.4, Oct-Dec 1997, p.416.

<sup>38</sup> *The Hindu* (Chennai), 1 May 2002.

North Africans in France.” And many polls since then have found that 25 to 30 per cent of French people agreed with the ideas of Le Pen on immigration. On the theme of immigration, the leader of the *Front National* drew the support of a larger group than those who voted for his party.<sup>39</sup>

What happened in first round of 2002 presidential election is troubling for democracies around the world and must be taken into account by politicians and leaders every where. It was a bit Challenge for Europe. However, the message – from a cold-headed analysis of the figures – to those worried about a right-wing extremist politician entering the Elysee Palace is: Don’t panic! One exist poll predicts 78 per cent votes for Mr. Chirac against 22 for Mr. Le Pen in the final round.<sup>40</sup>

On the first ballot, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s vote was only a shade higher than in 1995. He scored nothing like the breakthrough that Hitler achieved in September 1930 when his vote rose to 6.4 million from 810,000 two years before.<sup>41</sup> The collective sigh of relief that was heard when the second round result of 82 per cent for Chirac and just under 18 per cent for Le Pen echoed not only within the country but through out Western Europe.<sup>42</sup>

Nothing or almost nothing, has changed; yet everything is different. Furthermore, while no one had envisaged such an outcome for 21 April

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<sup>39</sup> Pierre Brechon and Subrata Kumar Mitra, “National Front in France: The Emergence of Extreme Right Protest Movement”, *Comparative Politics* (New York), vol.25, no.1, October 1992, pp.68.

<sup>40</sup> *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), 24 April 2002.

<sup>41</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 9 May 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Hindley, “Anxious in Europe”, *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.60.

2002, the seismographs had long been registering a tremor, indicating the main lines of the catastrophe: fragmentation of the system and volatility of the electorate, a growing political apathy manifesting itself in a low turnout and an extremist, populist vote, in other words, three recurring pathologies in modern democracies.<sup>43</sup>

Whatever configuration emerged from the second round elections, its task will be to meet the challenge of the far right to the political center on the issues that Le Pen emphasized: government corruption, rising crime and the encroachment upon French sovereignty of pan-European institutions. Nearly all of the 16 presidential candidates spoke of the need to protect Frenchness in the face of economic globalization, while taking for granted the objective of political integration in Europe. This is a strange mixture. It involves carping about the largely irresistible economic form of globalization and embracing uncritically the discretionary, political version. Le Pen profited from this awkward straddle by bashing the euro, although he also denounced economic globalization as a plot by American agribusiness to harm French family farms.<sup>44</sup>

Euro, the “Currency of Occupation” as addressed by Le Pen felt the heat from the blast. So it was perhaps no surprise that the Euro, which struggled for footing in the foreign exchange markets even when the continent’s

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<sup>43</sup> Meguet, n.4, p.211.

<sup>44</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 8 May 2002.

politicians firmly support it has stumbled a bit after Le Pen shocked France by winning a spot in the run off for the country's' presidency.<sup>45</sup>

“From the global investor’s standpoint, these things are not constructive for the euro”, said Neil Mc Kinnon, a strategist at Merrill Lynch and Co. in London. Unfortunately for the Euro, the French election shocker came at a time when the currency was enjoying one of its few periods of stability since its introduction in January 1999.<sup>46</sup> But economists estimated that the effect of Le Pen on the currency markets could be short-lived.

It is a case of the “*arroseeur arros*, the bitter bit”. That’s what the Belgians, the Austrians and the Italians, the Danes, the Dutch and the Germans are saying, as France wakes up reeling from the outcome of the April 21 presidential elections. Almost a fifth of those who voted, gave their support to the extreme right wing leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, allowing him to score over 17 per cent of the vote and knock the Socialists out of the second round.<sup>47</sup>

As far as the EU’s role is concerned, it was for the first time since 1958 that the EU had taken an unanimous decision. Whether it was Common Foreign and Security Policy or Maastricht Treaty, each of the members had maintained different views and could never come to a common stand. Thus, the decision of the EU in bringing about a diplomatic boycott or the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 24 April 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 24 April 2002

<sup>47</sup> *The Hindu*, 2 May 2002.

'sanction' seemed as if they were driven more by the opportunity to strengthen perceptions of it as a community of countries which can behave as an international actor rather than by the requirement of the situation.<sup>48</sup> (But on the other hand not endorsed by all member state).

Britain, Denmark, Sweden who were less keen were less comfortable with the EU's decision to intervene in what was considered a domestic matter. They also had fewer problem with the politics of the extreme right at home and were those who considered the EU as something less of a community of nations and maintained more traditional concept of national interest.<sup>49</sup>

These arguments put a question mark on the role of the EU in curbing the extreme Right parties. Critics suggest that it does not exhibit the characteristics of a state – according to them it is forum in which the government meets periodically in order to maintain bilateral and economic relations. However, the supporters countered the views of the critics when they argued that the EU feels increasingly justified in behaving as an international actor. They based their argument on the designation of Joerg Haider from the government which showed that member states could no longer afford to ignore the views expressed by the E.U.

With enlargement, the European Union will comprise of 25 countries and will stretch from the Baltics to Malta. Raising the standards of living of 75

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<sup>48</sup> Catherine Fieschi, "European Institutions: The Far Right and Illiberal Politics in a Liberal Contest", *Parliamentary Affairs* (Liverpool), vol.53 (2000), p.527.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.528.

million relatively poor citizens to the European means over time, as was done so spectacularly in the case of Ireland and Spain, is an expensive proposition. But the overall effect and consequences of enlargement for present and future EU citizens: would include, among others, the following.

- Over time there must have decent social conditions in the candidate countries. This means social security, jobs and responsible income.
- Crime and corruption are more and more a problem in parts of the former Communist bloc. There is a fear that this will spread one way and crime already has (on which extreme rights thrives and grows).
- The border free Schengen zone would help organized crime.
- Without compassion and solidarity, there will never make a success of EU enlargement.
- Citizens of the present the EU have had reservations about enlargement. Some politicians consider this to be a gold mine for anti-European sentiment.

Evidently, local conditions contributing to the rise of these extremists differ from country to country. Many of those who vote extreme right are the unemployed, under-qualified who have been left by the wayside in the latest “survival of the fittest” push to adjust to brute market forces.<sup>50</sup> Research has found that income, education, and occupation play significant roles in shaping public opinion towards European integration, with higher support among individual with more education and greater socio economic

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<sup>50</sup> *The Hindu*, 2 May 2002.

status. According to this argument, the potential economic benefits of the EU membership are greater for these individual than for poorer, less educated, lower class individuals and explain propensity to view integration more favourably.<sup>51</sup>

The vast and still growing power of the Brussels (and now Frankfurt) bureaucracy, whose political accountability is second or third-hand, has made many democrats in France as else where disillusioned with the system.<sup>52</sup> The real significance of Jean-Marie Le Pen's success in the recent presidential elections lies in what it tells us about the state of the French democracy. The ideals of the Fifth Republic, as conceived by Charles de Gaulle, have been gradually eroded by the European Union. The President is "no longer sovereign either in economic affairs or foreign policy, while Euro-regionalism has undermined the unity of the state. No wonder French voters have ceased to take the office seriously. The Fifth Republic has been hollowed out by Brussels. Now, the outer shell is crumbling".<sup>53</sup> The fault lies in the strong sense that modern politicians in Western Europe are "mere technocrats, managers and not leaders".<sup>54</sup>

There are, however, some common factors within Europe, there appears increasingly to be a chasm separating the governed and the governing. The sophistication, flexibility and audacity demanded by a technology-driven,

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<sup>51</sup> Master and Roy, n.4, p.420.

<sup>52</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 27 April 2002.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Hindley, "Anxious in Europe", *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.60.

extremely mobile, global economy dancing to the tune of fickle and ever-changing public tastes has left large number of people bewildered and unable to cope. In several countries of the European Union, people feel that their own state has become a mere puppet whose strings are pulled by faceless bureaucrats in Brussels, where the EU headquarters is situated.<sup>55</sup>

The French Employers' Federation (Medef) has spoken out against Le Pen. The chairman of the Medef, Ernst Antoine Selliers, considered Le Pen's economic policies as leading France towards massive unemployment and economic ruin. "The European Union has brought this country prosperity. Withdrawing from the Union and refusing the euro would shake investor confidence and lead to a major financial crisis in the country," he warned.<sup>56</sup>

For instance, there is only a weak correlation between aggregate levels of unemployment and extremist voting. As unemployment rose dramatically in Britain during the early 1980s, extreme right support collapsed. More recently, Spain – with one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe – has seen little extremist activity. Conversely, the recent success of the extreme right in Austria and Switzerland has taken place in countries with relatively low unemployment rates. At the individual level, there is some connection between unemployment and extremist voting, and – while this is difficult to measure - there may be an even stronger correlation with a rising fear of unemployment. Nevertheless, the correlation is relatively

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<sup>55</sup> Vaiju Naravane, "Europe's Right Turn", *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.57.

<sup>56</sup> *The Hindu*, 1 May 2002.



weak and does not support simplistic theses such as rising unemployment alone leads to extremism.

The more complex issue is what the French result means for the European venture as a whole. There may be some element of anti-Europeanism in the right's vote. But not much. All the polls in France as those in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and everywhere else the right has been resurgent – show that most people remain firmly pro-European. The challenge for European politicians is to turn the eyes of voters upwards, to prevent them turning inwards and down-wards. If Le Pen's success throws down this gauntlet, European leaders should pick it up with enthusiasm.<sup>57</sup>

Discrimination in favour of immigrants would only increase the resentment of the low earners or unemployed who make up much of the Le Pen vote. And subsidizing unemployment generates dependence and resentment.<sup>58</sup> The European Union must put real effort into building relations with North Africa. That would provide these countries with better opportunities for economic development and bring them closer to European political and social norms.<sup>59</sup>

Whatever discontent there may be in Europe, it remains an island of prosperity in a largely impoverished world. So immigrants will continue to risk an often hazardous journey, and tensions between them and their

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<sup>57</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 May 2002.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 April 2002.

European co-residents will continue to rise. A solution needs to be found not only in the interest of political stability but because the European Union needs immigration. It has an aging population and needs additional workers to offer its people the rising standard of living they have come to expect.

## CONCLUSION

All mainstream political parties in Europe are being urged to fight Jean-Marie Le Pen's crude and unpleasant policies. But the European Union itself also has an important part to play.<sup>60</sup> Although the French handed down a massive defeat to Le Pen in the second round of the 2002 presidential election, the rise of the extreme Right in general has shocked many West European nations. People fear that whether politics is on the decline in Western-style democracies. Two far-right parties are in power in the continent (Austria and Italy). In Britain, the extreme Right British National Party (BNP) won three seats in the local elections in the northern town of Burnely.

The EU's external policy has become more coherent, its voice on human rights has become weaker. Co-ordination, EU-style, has proved detrimental to the defence of human rights. Unless something is done, a bigger EU will only make things worse.<sup>61</sup> There is widespread anxiety in European nation-states centered around identity and this is linked with the integration of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 2 May 2002.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 10 Dec 2002.

“Europe”. The enlargement of the EU has include ten more members. The stakes are high and costs could prove disastrous.

Jean-Marie Len Pen and the more polished Bruno Megret are waiting in the wings, poised to mop up voters, which may push the Left back sometimes. As far as their basic programmes are concerned, there are no fundamental difference between Megret and Le Pen. Although Megret often uses democratic phraseology, they both share the same fascist ideology. The right wing extremist parties throughout Western Europe have been facilitated by their primarily anti-immigrant platform, making scapegoats of refugees and asylum-seekers. Nebulous appeals to unite as “Europeans” do not find resources in disinherited and disintegrated pockets of urban decay where the nationalistic appeal is still vibrant. When French and British voters were asked why they voted far right, many disavowed racist views but said that they regard the far right as at least acknowledge that there was a problem and expressed respect for politicians who actually speak their mind.

This has been the rhetoric of European summits – that Europe should be brought closer to its citizens – for the last decade. But, rhetoric it has remained, and there can be no doubt that this inertia has helped compound the sense of powerlessness at street level which is now evidently so strong in the cities, towns and villages of southern and eastern France.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2 May 2002.

It was once said that the art of democratic leadership is to persuade people to do what they would prefer not to do. That requires clarity, frankness, trust and constant and intimate attention to people's fears and worries. However difficult the way forward, people must never be allowed to feel that their concerns are not listened to. What is remote is frightening, and the institutions of the European Union have allowed themselves to become very remote indeed.

The flaw lies in the belief that democratic legitimacy and connection with the grassroots can be conferred by strengthening, modestly, the powers of the European Parliament. With luck "the Le Pen eruption will be contained and France will return to calmness. But those who are shaping Europe's future have been given a sharp lesson and a healthy reminder that modern Europe needs both deep reform and a real change of direction, not a cosmetic one. Failure to deliver on promises could well lead to a realignment which would push the left back for some time".<sup>63</sup>

Like other western-style democracies the end of the Cold War and the growing apathy to, alienation from and disillusionment with the political process have led to a vanishing participation in elections, creating a vacuum that can be filled by fascists and fraud. The essentially apolitical managers

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<sup>63</sup> Balveer Arora, "France: The Election Victory of the Left", *World Focus*, vol.18, no.8, August 1997, p.10.

of the political process in Western Europe are unprepared for this re-emergence of raw politics and the dangerous vacuum is emerging.<sup>64</sup>

The French are in a waiting room between the nation-state and the federation in the making. They are warred by what might be coming. All this poses a considerable challenge to President Jacques Chirac and beyond him to the leaders of Europe and the European Union. Can immigration, which is both inevitable and needed and its legacy of a “fractured society” be dealt with on a European basis, effectively but humanely, without the full vigor of the work-or-starve ethic that is accepted across the Atlantic? Over the next decade, that will be one of the biggest challenges facing the European Union.

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Hindley, “Anxious in Europe”, *Frontline*, 7 June 2002, p.60.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **IMPACT OF THE FRONT NATIONAL ON THE FRENCH POLITY**

The 1980s and 1990s in France are often seen, and not without some justification, as the years of the 'new consensus'. In other words, the 1980s and 1990s were an era in which politicians from diverse and hitherto opposed political traditions and parties found much common ground on which they could agree. There emerged then, from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, a new shared understanding of and agreement on the proper role of government, state institutions and so on. From economic policy (e.g. the strong franc, commitment to low inflation) to defence (e.g. supporting the allies in the Gulf War), there was consensus.

However, in the midst of this 'new consensus', the rise of the *Front National* and its extreme policies stands out as something of an exception and disrupts our picture of France since the 1980s. The *Front National* when it came to prominence in the early 1980s rejected this common ground and offered its own radical proposals: reintroducing the death penalty, criminalizing abortion, blocking moves towards further European integration, isolating AIDS sufferers and of course, clamping down on immigrants.

Although France has its own specific tradition of a radical Right, it might be assumed that the events of the Second World War (occupation, Vichy etc.) would have discredited it and debarred any such party from playing a major role in France's postwar politics. Moreover, France's increasing economic prosperity and the kind of nationalism that de Gaulle espoused was successful in marginalizing the radical Right till the 1980s. But the extreme

right has become a permanent feature of French politics and offers an explanation of why it is that the FN moved to the centre of the political stage in France during the 1980s. We shall now seek to give tentative answers to questions about the reasons for the take-off of the FN and discuss its impact on French political life.

The key reasons why the extreme right has become a major topic of concern in recent years is because they have adapted their discourses over the years as they pursue attempts at accommodation, differentiation and distinction. There are complex interactions between these groups and the political system more generally. Now they have become full-time actors in the political game. Hence, the establishment of the FN proceeded from strategic adaptation to the political system, which implied giving up all forms of activism on the one hand, and adjusting to the access conditions of the electoral competition on the other hand (implying the adoption of moderate speech and images).

Poor early electoral results led to a split. In the beginning, FN expressed full ideological opposition to the democratic system and parliamentary government. In 1991, Le Pen could not even gather 500 signatures. Three years later, the FN obtained 11.2 per cent in the European elections. Because of strategic phases of adaptation, new themes in FN platforms, such as ecology, agriculture or social questions emerged. Le Pen's comments on the inequality between races proved successful in the 1995 presidential election.



However aggravated internal tensions between the two wings of the movement, mirrored by the confrontation between Le Pen and Bruno Megret, made this perspective unlikely and led the FN to a split which undoubtedly came from the clash of ambitions, as well as the merciless confrontation of two strategies. On the one hand, Le Pen and his own followers were obsessed by the conservation of the ideological “purity” of the movement and rejected the slightest compromise with the parties of “the establishment” “on the other hand Megret and his clan, concerned with “the conquest of responsibilities” and convinced that they will need to make alliances in order to succeed.

There are growing signs that extremism, even in the West is far from dead that we celebrated prematurely the universal victory of democracy. Perhaps the turn of the twenty-first century was an interregnum, rather than a turning point. In Western Europe there has been the rise of ‘extreme right’ and ‘populist’ parties such as Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National*, which posed a radical challenge to existing elites – even to the liberal political system.

In the late 1990s it could be argued quite plausibly, that the *Front National* led and personified by Jean-Marie Le Pen is one of the key players in French politics. Its power lies not only in the votes that it gains an average of 15 per cent in all elections but, perhaps more significantly, in the influence that it carries. Here, the notion that the FN is an agenda setter is vital a flick through any national newspaper will conform the fact that the party has been

effective in hosting its concerns to the top of the national political agenda, and in forcing other political formation to react to and position themselves on, these particular issues – most notably of course, immigration.

The Single Issue Theory explains the reason for working class support. It places considerable emphases on the attractiveness of anti-immigrant politics, or issues which can be closely related to this. It implies that extreme right parties will do especially well at a time when there are major concerns about immigration, at either the national or more local level. They blame immigrants for all the socio-economic problems. These concerns in the minds of the people are tempered in order to gain votes.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1990s the ‘political opportunity structure’ was adopted by these parties. This theory focuses on the actions and programmes of mainstream parties. This includes the system of election in particular country. The presence of the system of proportional representation is favourable to small parties which allows them to gain representation. This approach also holds that when the mainstream parties struggle to pick up the issue and cluster around the center, the extreme parties make a break through. The issue which they bring up presently are that of anti-immigrant sentiment, the hostility to the European Union and globalisation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Eatwell, “The Rebirth of the ‘Extreme-Right’ in Western Europe?”, *Parliamentary Affairs* (Liver Pool), vol.53 (2000), pp.420-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.422.

However, the political philosopher Chantal Mouffe claims that it is the “consensus at the center” type of politics that leads to the blurring of the left or right divide and as a consequence to the rise of extreme right-wing parties. According to him, as a result of “skilful populist rhetoric, they have been able to articulate many demands of the ordinary people,...., and they are: trying to present themselves as the only guarantors of the sovereignty of the people”.<sup>3</sup>

It is difficult to narrow down on any one of these theories as the actual reason for their rise. It is a combination of all these factors: notable loss of trust in the mainstream parties, the belief that it is economically rational to support some extreme right policies, the loss of faith in old ideologies, political corruption and hydra of globalisation. His beating of the nationalist drum has always been modulated to please the particular audience being addressed.<sup>4</sup>

For nearly 20 years and with noticeable success since the municipal election of 1983. Le Pen and his consorts have harped upon there incursive presence and the more general issue of immigration.<sup>5</sup> It is none the less true that Jean-Marie Le Pen’s electoral success were a major element in the emergence of immigration into French politics during the middle 1980s. It was, of course,

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<sup>3</sup> Oliver Merchant, “The ‘Fourth way’ of the Ultra Right: Austria, Europe and the End of Neo – Corporatism”, *Capitol and Class* (London), vol.73, Winter (2000), pp.11-12.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Brechon and Subrata Kumar Mitra, “National Front in France: The Emergence of Extreme Right Protest Movement”, *Comparative Politics* (New York), vol.25, no.4, October 1992, p.68.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Sutton, “France: Who Beats the Nationalist Drum?”, *World Today* (London), vol.47, no.6, 1991, p.99.

the FN that had made the early running on immigration, anxious at that time to depict the mainstream right as having been lax, even accommodating, in its position of the issue.

The *National Front* has risen to national prominence because it has succeeded in giving concrete political expression to a latent xenophobia, reinforced by the problem of immigration. It has succeeded in placing this latent xenophobic fear in the context of a general ideology of the extreme right, based on a rejection of established political parties and distrust of democracy. Essentially an able populist politician, Le Pen mobilizes opinion against the political elite, whom he presents as far too soft to provide effective solutions for contemporary problems. By expressing it politically, the *National Front* has given both reinforcement and legitimacy to xenophobia. Following her success at Dreux, Marie-France Stirbois claimed that her election was a victory against the “foreign invader”.<sup>6</sup>

The success of the mainstream right in securing a bare majority in the March 1986 elections, accompanied by the arrival in the legislature of a group of thirty five FN deputies, gave an immediate focus to immigration. The new government, particularly under the Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, was committed to restrict immigration. With Pasqua Law of 9 September 1986, the frontier controls were strengthened and expulsion of the illegal

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<sup>6</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p. 80.

immigrants or those foreigners who has been convicted for more than six months were eased out.<sup>7</sup>

An 'immigrant' is used to refer to a worker who entered and later left a country of destination on a rotational basis or for the purpose of employment. Within this general category are two sub-types :

- The guest workers introduced by purposive recruitment, usually by the private sector but strictly controlled by the state (e.g. in the case of the Federal Republic of Germany and Switzerland).
- The guest worker system operated on laissez-faire principles and without deregister involvement from the state. This is seen in the French situation during the 1950s and 1960s, often with minimum attempt to police frontiers against illegal immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

The problems began in the 1950s in France when postwar "Islamic immigration" first started. Since most of them came from French colonies, there was an element of contempt towards the immigrants. France's North African immigrant slums were born. In the minds of many people, these ghettos are synonymous with crime, drug abuse, trafficking, illiteracy, violence and Islamic fundamentalism.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher T. Husbands, "The Mainstream Right and The Politics of Immigration in France : Major Developments in the 1980s" , *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (London), Vol.14, no.2, April 1991, p.187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, n.2, p.171.

The *National Front*, in marked contrast to other parties, used the incident for political propaganda, arguing that the incident demonstrated a form of religious and cultural colonization of France that threatened its very identity with extinction. Since immigration was the root cause of these problems, the *National Front* argued, most immigrants should be sent back to where they came from. Over the years, FN has put forward a number of proposals to solve the problem of inassimilable immigrants. It includes a ban on a new immigration, a ban on family regrouping, expulsion of unemployed and those convicted in criminal cases, restricted access to welfare benefits etc.<sup>9</sup>

Immigration is such a hot potato that politicians are often reluctant to encourage debate. A liberal stance on immigration can mean taking on the hard right. It is vital to consider the impact of populist parties on other parties, Regardless of whether 'populist' parties are admitted into local or national coalitions, they tend to have an effect on mainstream parties, especially in the realm of immigration and related issues. In France in the 1980s and 1990s, there was much talk of the 'Le Penization' of politics, with even parties of the left borrowing from the FN's programmes and rhetoric.<sup>10</sup>

In a debate on the budget in the National Assembly in November 1986, the then Minister of the Interior Pierre Joxe had evoked consternation in sections of the Parti Socialiste (PS) by the political colour of some of those who most loudly applauded him when he announced: "France does not have

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<sup>9</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p.67.

<sup>10</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 9 March 2001.

the means to become a country that can receive all the disinherited from developing countries. She cannot indefinitely welcome all those who are driven from their country by poverty and who came to try their luck here".<sup>11</sup>

Incidents like the one over the Islamic scarf symbolize the difficulties regarding the proper recognition of the position and role of the Islamic community in France and the fear of the foreigner, deeply embedded in French society, which become explicit at a time of economic crisis and high unemployment. A section of the public thus viewed its protest against the headscarf as an act of resistance to the march of Islamic fundamentalism. This incident thus helped to activate the latent xenophobia in those sections of French society which extended their support to the *National Front* and see it as the defender of French identity against the onslaught of Islam.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen as a candidate could not but propel immigration into the 1998 presidential campaign, especially in view of the strains between the two first round candidates. Subsequently, in the autumn of 1989 and into 1990, the Government was ambushed by the so-called 'headscarves affair'. It was an incident from which the mainstream Right derived no tangible benefit. In fact, it is debated to what extent even the government lost popularity since its ratings oscillated in the period from October 1989 to March 1990 and showed no clear downward trend. It was the *Front National*, of course, that derived unambiguous benefit from the

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<sup>11</sup> Husbands, n.2, p.189.

<sup>12</sup> Brechon and Mitra., n.4, p.68.

incident which showed that the mainstream Right always risks being harmed by a national debate on such a subject, when there is viable an active alternative on its own right.

In the Socialist Party, those who considered themselves to be defenders of non-religious education and feminists were generally in favour of a total ban on the headscarf, whereas the others were for tolerance in the name of freedom of expression. The Right was generally towards the total ban on the headscarf and the centre of the Social Democrats adopted a more moderate position and asked for tolerance all around.

The French hostility to immigrants was shown by a poll taken by the polling agency for LICRA (The International League Against Racism and Anti-Semitism) which found that 66 per cent of the French, thought there were “far too many North African in France”. Many polls since then have shown that 25 to 30 per cent of the French people agree with the ideas of Le Pen on immigration. On this theme, the leader of the FN drew a large support in the Elections of 1989.<sup>13</sup> They were seen as a threat – the Algerian war has shown how dramatically and decisively French culture and society had been rejected, and this had affected the consciousness of the left no less than the Right.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., n.1, p.68.

<sup>14</sup> Cathie Lloyd and Hazel Waters, “France: One Culture, One People?”, *Race and Class* (London), vol.32, no.3, 1991, pp.55-56.



It is here that the most ominous lesson to be drawn from this election lies. Disaffection with mainstream parties in France has been growing for over a decade (since the emergence of the FN in the 1984 European elections, to be precise); and it is the FN, with its campaign slogan “Throw them out” that continued to reap its bitter fruits.<sup>15</sup>

The parties of the ‘band of four’ (Union for a Democratic France, Parti Communiste, Rassemblement pour la Republique, Parti Socialiste) support the constructions of Islamic centres and subsidise them with French money.

During the early years of the 1990s the government of the left in France made a concerted effort to put into effect a number of new policy of social integration for immigrants the moderate Right wanted to stop new immigration and made it much difficult for foreigners to acquire the social welfare benefits. These measures, however, were never attracted to the general public and the intention to vote for FN grew slowly. This growing supports of FN was also influenced by the economic and political situation of those times.

Le Pen is a controversial figure in French politics, with his blunt anti-immigrant messages and blatant calls in favour of discrimination. For him many, more foreigners means more unemployment and crime. Jean-Marie Le Pen paints a frightening picture of immigrants descending upon France robbing the French and snatching their jobs. But statistics provide a

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<sup>15</sup> James G. Shield, “Europe’s other Landslide: The French National Assembly Elections of May-June 1997”, *Political Quarterly*, vol.68, no.4, Oct-Dec 1997, p.420.

different picture. Over the past few years the number of immigrants coming legally in France has declined steadily and less than 50,000 immigrants came into the country last year. France now rejects 85 percent of all pleas for political asylum and the number of illegal immigrants entering their country has reduced to a trickle. Joblessness among the immigrant community is as high as 20 per cent, a whole 10 per cent higher than the national average.

In the French case, unemployment and the number of immigrants were not enough for the extreme Right to get its chance. The Left had to get into office for Le Pen to take off. It does not mean that “once the Right is back in office or the Left has proved that it does not endanger rules of the game, the FN vanishes. Once grown, it acquires a life of its own”.<sup>16</sup>

The *National Front* vote in Dreux, which it has maintained for a long time compared to its performance at the national level, appears to be drawn from the lower social strata. Many of these supporters from the working classes were probably born and brought up in the countryside and migrated to the town to look for work. They are not properly integrated into urban life and feel that economic modernization leads to the loss of their identity and of the values basic to them. Nostalgia for the past and for the values and sense of identity going back to their childhood attracts them to the *National Front*, which presents itself as the defender of French identity and stands for the speedy departure of immigrants, seen as the cause of all that is not well.

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Singer, “The Resistible Rise of Jean Marie Le Pen”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 1991, p.378.

Their removal from French soil would restore the good, stable social order of the past.<sup>17</sup> Le Pen appears to have cleverly taken aim at French political reflexes on globalisation, and American role in the world as building blocks in selling his pitch. He creates a comfortable setting for the foulest part of his message by placing it in the framework of the familiar terms of conventional French politics.<sup>18</sup>

Influence by the arguments of the New Right theorists concerning the ideological struggle and the need for a thorough renewal of the Right-wing political culture, the FN has devoted enormous efforts to production and dissemination of ideology. This area of party's activity has been co-ordinated by *Delegue General* and his staff. This propaganda section produces posters, tracts, leaflets, audio and video cassettes, etc. A separate section exists for organizing major demonstrations, commemorations, festivals, public meetings and so forth. A training section runs the *Institute de Formation National* (IFN) to educate activists, organize lectures etc. The communication section deals with press releases and monitors the media. The theoretical journal *Identite* services as a laboratory and show case of ideas which distilled into the party's manifesto.

There has been a dramatic increase in extremist propaganda. In some cases this stems from intellectual developments. More generally, the Internet has

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<sup>17</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p.74.

<sup>18</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 3 May 2002.

opened up new opportunities. FN was the first to use extensively and usually well-presented websites for the party's propaganda.

Traditionally, in the two round ballot which is prevalent in France, the first round ballot provides the electorate an opportunity to express discontent without bearing the consequences, as the second round irons out many of problems arising from fringe preferences. It is populist in so far as it seeks to mobilize support by claiming to speak on behalf on ordinary decent people against a corrupt, degenerate ruling elite.<sup>19</sup> The French vote FN fears of a changing world and their loathing of their own politicians. They rewarded extremism, and eccentricity in equal measure. And Le Pen will hammer away at distress caused by globalization and urge the French to stay, well, French.<sup>20</sup> The shocking performance of the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the French presidential election in 2002 is an indication of what can happen when the locus of national politics in a country shifts steadily rightwards and when 'mainstream' politicians try to co-opt or conciliate with chauvinism instead of fighting it.<sup>21</sup>

Jacques Chirac's result was the worst ever obtained by a President seeking re-election. His results were similar to those he obtained in 1988 and 1995, but his electoral base was weak: only 13.75 per cent of registered voters, in other words, one voter in seven. In the first round one-third of the French

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<sup>19</sup> Alistair Cole, *French Politics and Society* (London: Prentice Press Hall), p.175.

<sup>20</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>21</sup> *Times of India* (New Delhi), 24 April 2002.

electorate stayed at home.<sup>22</sup> In his favourite arena, the presidential election, (Jean-Marie Le Pen increased his vote by 250,000) compared to 1995. The number is small, the difference is huge.<sup>23</sup> What the French election revealed is that in France, as in the United States, there are “a lot of angry people. They are not a majority. But they are highly motivated, and can exert influence out of proportion to their numbers if moderates take a tolerant society for granted”.<sup>24</sup>

What are the angry people angry about? - it is about traditional values (not economic and prosperity). France targets immigrants. In both cases this angry minority has had for more influence than its numbers would suggest. Le Pen is a political outsider. His showing in 2002 presidential election puts him into the second-round runoff, but it was expected that he won't actually become France's President. So his hard-right ideas won't be put into practice anytime soon. But his strong first round showing has delivered an overdue shock to the country's political systems and to Europe. Le Pen, who is known for his racially tinged demagoguery against immigrants, captured 17 per cent of the vote meaning that, one out of every five French Voters chose to back a platform of bigotry and xenophobia (i.e., 17 per cent of Le Pen and 2 per cent of Mouvement National Republicain).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Arnould Miguet, “The French Election of 2002”, *West European Politics*, vol.25, no.4, October 2002, pp.207-8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, n.4, p.212.

<sup>24</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 24 April 2002.

“An extremely dangerous man” - Chirac called Le Pen in one of his interviews. On the other hand, Le Pen, said that if elected he will deport all illegal immigrants and assume French citizens priority in jobs, housing and social benefits. He wants to pull France out of the European Union and restore the franc as its currency.<sup>26</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen, running for President of France attracted more attention focused on him than he ever could have imagined in 30 years in politics. Television, radio, and newspaper interviews left a documented trail of his jagged thinking.<sup>27</sup> But moderate left joined the Right in order to sideline extreme Right with the slogan: “Together against Le Pen”.<sup>28</sup>

Voters backed Chirac, in order to marginalize former paratrooper Le Pen. But Former Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin bowed out of politics after Le Pen beat him to the final presidential duel. Chirac, crushed Le Pen with an unprecedented 82 per cent of the vote.<sup>29</sup> It was a landslide victory over his far right challenger, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the *Front National*. He suddenly named Jean-Pierre Raffarin to serve as head of an interim Conservative Government that aims to respond to voter discontent and fear over rising crime. And this is the amount of fear FN creates in the hearts of mainstream parties. After his defeat, Jospin resigned from politics after the second round, leaving the party in the hands of its secretary, Francois

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<sup>26</sup> *The Hindu* (Chennai), 31 March 2001.

<sup>27</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 3 May 2002.

<sup>28</sup> *The Hindu*, 2 May 2002.

<sup>29</sup> *New Indian Express* (Chennai), 6 May 2002.

Hollande.<sup>30</sup> Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right National Front, has emerged as the decisive kingmaker, on more aptly king-breaker.<sup>31</sup>

In a victory message, Chirac said he had "heard and understood" the message of French voters, who knocked Jospin out in the first round of the presidential voting on April 21 and gave a strong protest vote to the right-wing challengers, Jean-Marie Le Pen, a champion of law and order and anti-immigrant sentiment. Taking a page from the campaign manual of Le Pen, Chirac said that the new government's "first priority" would be to deal with the crime issue by re-establishing a sense of security among the French. After that would come tax cuts, to ensure economic growth jobs and secure pensions, he said.

Despite being eliminated after the first round, the Left was nevertheless present in the second round of 2002, since it campaigned for Chirac in order to block Jean-Marie Le Pen, this was the amount of threat felt by the Left. With a much higher turnout, Le Pen's vote was held below 20 per cent of the votes coasted. This was, by his own admission, a poor result, demonstrating his inability to ride the wave of his first round success.

### **ELECTORAL SUPPORT OF THE *FRONT NATIONAL***

Much has been written about the voters of the *Front National*. Indeed, it has been suggested that no party's electorate in France has had such attention

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<sup>30</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 23 April 2002.

<sup>31</sup> *The Times* (London), 27 May 1997.

devoted to it. Studies show that its electors cannot be stereotyped: they have different reasons for voting and their sociological profile has changed over the year of success. Policies, personality, political circumstances and socio-economic changes are all relevant factors. To a large extent, there is undoubtedly protest factor at work behind its success. A vote for it can be seen as a vote against immigration and elites, against alleged or perceived decline and decadence.<sup>32</sup>

Who exactly votes for the Front? This varies from election to election. There are certain patterns and biases in the sociological profile of the party's electorate. *Front National* draws its supporters from varied groups. Studies show that its electors cannot be a stereotyped: they have different reasons for voting, whether it is political or economic, the reasons have changed over the year-policies, personalities, political circumstances and socio-economic changes are all relevant factors. From the outset, though the failures of a disillusionment with political parties owed much for the party to gain a break through, the protest factors has always been at work.

The typical *National Front* voters are poor whites of lower middle class origin who have ambitions for upward mobility but feel threatened by the presence of immigrants, whom they hold responsible for everything that is not right. These people, who live in daily fear of the "devilish" immigrants

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Hainsworth and Paul Mitchell, "France: The Front National from Crossroads to Crossroads", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.53, 2000, p.446.



just beyond the periphery of their neighborhood, express their anger and resentment by voting for the *National Front*.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting that Bihr refers to the linkage between the discourse of Le Pen and the French electorate. Even though this study is about the ideas of the FN, and not the sociology of its vote, it is important at this early stage in our enquiries to be aware of this relationship. It could be argued that for these people it is anger at, and frustration with, the political system which provokes them into voting for the FN – a significantly vociferous ‘anti-system’ party. The FN vote is based at bottom, on ‘negative’ protest or the ‘positive’ appeal of the party’s ideas.

The feeling is that many French voters are attracted to the FN precisely because it is new, different and not a ‘traditional’ political party, and in this sense it has succeeded the Parti Communiste Francais (PCF) as the main receptacle of the protest vote. Perrineau argues that the FN actually thrives on ‘anger’ and uses this to its political advantage. The inference to be drawn here is that individuals who vote for the party are not opting in ‘favour’ of the policies and political ideas embodied by it, but rather, choosing to vote ‘against’ the political status quo in France.

The National Front appears to have a significant appeal precisely because of its ideas. Indeed, data from recent elections casts important light on this issue. For example, an exit poll during the 1988 presidential elections

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<sup>33</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p.70.

revealed that 76 per cent of Le Pen's voters opted for him because of his ideas, while only 57 per cent of bare.

The other possible motivations, 'personality' and 'party loyalty', are significant variables in the equation – there is a strong indication here that ideas are important to prospective FN voters and we should not dismiss the FN as a movement with no positive appeal.

Both protest and policy are significant dimensions to the FN's electoral attraction, and thus when we refer to the party's electorate we should not jump to hasty conclusions. Of course, the FN poses as the protest party par excellence, but as this study unfolds we should not forget that vital constituencies within the French electorate – small businessmen, farmers and the unemployed, to name but three – are attracted to the FN for positive reasons and because the brand of nationalism upheld by the party is in some sense seductive.

The tendency to recruit relatively younger, more 'popular' and least educated voters is an argument, is the most defining characteristic of the voters. It is regarded as the most masculine of all French electorates: considerably more men go for party. The reasons for these could be the exhibits of the party which lays emphasis on child-rearing and family duties. Many women, on the other hand, feel that the numerous propositions, of the FN are totally outdated and some FN policies are dangers for the daily life of

women in France.<sup>34</sup> Again, regular religious practice (Catholicism) is seen to be prevalent among females, and there is evidence to suggest that religious practitioners are less likely to support the Front than other duties -- possibly alienated by its perceived lack of pluralistic tolerance.

A second defining factor is age: The Front draws disproportionately from the 18-39 range, doing particularly well amongst the young, first time and hitherto abstentions voters, where formal education, skills and experience are limited and unemployment is high, immigrants issue is brought about. At this point, the party which claims 'La France aux Français' polls especially well.<sup>35</sup>

The territorial composition of the votes for FN over the past elections could be used as a benchmark in this study. Support in its area of strength went up significantly in reaction to catalytic events like the headscarf. The relationship between fear, a state of insecurity, violent crime and rise of extreme right is further confined by the findings from the opinion polls. The electors of the FN appear to be much more xenophobic than average voters. Among the electors the FN, 63 per cent thought immigration to be the cause of unemployment, compared to 27 per cent for the country as a whole. They

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<sup>34</sup> Pascal Perinann, "The Conditions for the Re-emergence of an Extreme- Right Wing in France: the National Front, 1984-98" in Edward J. Arnold (ed.), *The Development of the Radical Right in France: From Boulage to Le Pen* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), p.258.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.259.

are largely favourable towards the idea of sending the vast majority back to “where they came from.”<sup>36</sup>

The other groups which have been loyal supporters of the *Front National* are the conservatives – classified mainly as lower middle class. In older age, many have remained adamantly anti-Gaullist, regretting the Fourth Republic or Algerie Franchise or usually both. However, among those who reached adulthood after 1958, there is apparently a significant proportion who consider themselves to be Gaullist. Thus, though it is difficult to say how many Gaullists are won over by FN, it is evident that there is always a shift between the two parties – depending on the issues at each election.

Religion has been playing an important role in French elections, though Catholicism is the primary religion of France from the number of people declaring themselves to be Catholics is diminishing. The regular churchgoers are said to be far closer to FN than the non-believing and non-practicing group as their level of tolerance is much higher when compared to the latter group.<sup>37</sup> Le Pen who has been beating the nationalist drum by playing on the fear of citizens of France has won a substantial support for his movement.

The geography of the Le Pen vote confirmed the pattern of past elections. Support for Le Pen was concentrated in the most urbanized and

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<sup>36</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p.70.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Boy and Nanna Mayer, “Cleavage Voting and issue Voting in France” in Michael S.Lewis Beck (ed.), *How France Votes* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000), pp.154-6.

industrialized departments of the north and north-east, around Paris and Lyons and along the Mediterranean littoral. Le Pen came first in two of France's twenty-two regions (Alsace and Provence-Alpes-Cote d' Azur) and second to Jospin in a further three (Lorraine, Languedoc-Roussillon and Nord-Pas-de-Calais). Though support for the FN leader remained the highest in urban areas marked by economic recession. Unemployment, high crime rates and large immigrant communities, the Le Pen vote cannot be correlated simplistically with these factors. In certain parts of Alsace, where unemployment, crime and immigration levels are relatively low, Le Pen performed very strongly, emerging as the leading candidate in some small towns and villages. While it is from its urban bastions (Mulhouse, Toulon, Nice, Marseille) that the FN derives the bases of its national strength, support for Le Pen is spread throughout the more rural areas of France. In only one of the country's ninety-six metropolitan departments (Chirac's stronghold of Corrèze) did the Le Pen vote drop below 7 per cent in this election.

The 2002 presidential elections confirmed well established trends towards the fragmentation of the French political system and the rejection of ruling parties. Voters who felt they wanted an alternative to mainstream policy or to longtime leaders had to opt for parties out of the mainstream. People regard Jean-Marie Le Pen as one of the rare French politicians who speaks of the nation, the people and the country. And he is also one of the rare people who actually knows the meaning of these words. The FN claims the

'Gang of Four' use the method of 'media plot' to victimize it and deny its expression.<sup>38</sup> FN presents these parties as being equally static, incompetent, devoid of idealism, different to the interest of the nation and often corrupt.<sup>39</sup>

The French have voted on reducing the term of the powerful French presidency, from seven years to five years. This is the most important change to the Gaullist Constitution since 1962, when direct presidential election were introduced.<sup>40</sup> The holding of this referendum is seen as yet more proof that their politicians are out of touch. Indeed, the relatively low turnout in the first round of Presidential voting, in which almost 30 percent of voters state at home, was attributed by some to the perception that the presidency has lost much of its importance.

Some said in 2002 that France experienced a shock that made the Fifth Republic tremble. Such an assumption cannot be made of France without significant qualifications. The constitutional status, if not the legitimacy, of parliament has been, and to some extent still remains, an issue for debate. The Vichy regime was established in 1940 on the ruins of the third Republic by the enemies parliamentary government. The unloved parliamentary Fourth Republic was replaced in 1958 by the executive – dominated Fifth Republic.<sup>41</sup> De Gaulle set Michel Debre to draw up the constitution of the

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<sup>38</sup> C. Rodgers, "Le Front National" in N.A. Addinall (ed.), *French Political Parties: A Documentary Guide* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> *The Times*, 21 September 2000.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 21 September 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Franco Rizzuto, "France: Something of a Rehabilitation", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.50, no.3, 1997, pp.373-4.

Fifth Republic in 1958. But much of General Charles de Gaulle's constitutional upheaval has eroded away.

Neither one can elude responsibility for governance nor claim to offer a fresh alternative. This is the result of a crotchet in the Gaullist system of institutions that provides for both a President as the top leader and a Prime Minister who runs the daily affairs. It was obvious from the start that the situation is very different if the President and the Prime Minister work of rival parties, but that did not happen until three Presidents later. Since then, in three out of four national elections, the presidential and parliamentary powers have been split between opponent. The French found a name for it, cohabitation. A new French Republic will have "to resolve that dilemma, and the answer will determine whether prime power remains in the President's hands or moves back to the Parliament as in the Fourth Republic".<sup>42</sup>

In most European democracies, including Germany and Italy, the office of the President is largely ceremonial. In France, by contrast, the presidency is intended to serve as a center of power and counter-weight to the authority of the Prime Minister and Parliament. That arrangement has worked well when the president and parliamentary majority are allied. But few years back, in the mid-1980s and the 1990s and during the five year tenure of Jospin as Prime Minister, French voters had elected a President and parliamentary

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<sup>42</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 22 May 2002.

majority from different ends of political spectrum, leading to a power-sharing arrangement known as cohabitation.

The support for Parliament can be shown in two ways. The first in terms of voter turnout at elections. This is probably the case in France, where voter turnouts for parliamentary elections have historically always been lower than for presidential elections but nonetheless respectable levels. Extensive and frequent displays of public disaffection with particular measures of public policy, for example through large public demonstrations or riots, would imply a low level of support and parliament not being an adequate arena for expressing public sentiment or resolving disputes.

Corruption, of course, is a practice that has implicated both the right and the left in France. The continuous increase of votes for FN is a terrible embarrassment for France's political elite. The mainstream parties are now mounting an all-out effort against Le Pen. But this should not be enough. France's leaders, beginning with Chirac, ought to re-examine whether their government is doing enough to foster tolerance towards immigrants particularly those from the Muslim world, while combating growing anti-Semitism. A serious campaign against corruption is also badly needed.

Above all, France's politicians might take the first round results of 2002 presidential election as a warning of what happens when government institutions, and bureaucratic decision-making, drift too far from local communities and grass roots democracy. The vast majority of French voters



do not really want an extremist president, but neither do they want to perpetuate a political system whose leaders appear to pay them to little heed.<sup>43</sup>

Since the F.N. was formed in 1972, when it was little more than a coalition of neo-fascist groups, Le Pen has managed to force his party to move from the political margins into the mainstream-aided and abetted by both the Left and the Right, which at different times have cynically used him for their own short term political ends. After spending its first 13 years in the political wilderness the FN emerged as a durable feature of French politics during 1983 winning between 10 and 15 per cent of the vote in recent years. According to Shields, the rise of the powerful extreme Right party is arguably the most important political development of the past fourteen years.

The 1990s saw the sudden rise of strength in the extreme right *Front National*. This alarmed the mainstream parties, whose failure to understand the needs of the masses was one of the reasons for FN to reach this height. Much of the FN vote can no longer be described as a mere 'protest' vote, but rather as a vote 'for' the party's brand of radical xenophobic and authoritarian populism.

The Front may have yet to win seats in national government but, as to be seen following the party's experiments in Vitrolles, Marignane and Orange,

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<sup>43</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 24 April 2002.

its agenda for the whole of France now seems clearer. Le Pen announced on 19 June 1995 that in the municipalities elections which it controlled, his party would implement a policy of “national preference” which would effectively disadvantage foreigners and naturalise immigrants in allocations in such areas as subsidized housing, social security benefit and jobs. Jean-Marie Le Pen urged the newly elected mayors to stick on to their electoral promises with which they had come to power. The Front mayors turned to using their power over administration, by-laws and budgets to send out the message that immigrants were not welcome in their towns. Despite these social measures, introduced by FN in these constituencies FN continued to maintain the same support and in the 1997 elections repeated the results of 1995 presidential elections.<sup>44</sup>

The Front went on to become a model for many parties, combining fervent nationalism, opposition to immigration, and a populist hostility to the political establishment. The Front’s emergence has had a mobilizing effect on the mainstream in France, with parties across the political spectrum nervously guarding votes in the face of the rising tide in its support and often themselves adopting language and policies more closely associated with extreme right.

This can be seen the actions of Chirac’s 1986-88 government, which tightened immigration controls, restored random identity card checks and

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<sup>44</sup> Hainsworth and Mitchell, vol.53, p.448.

even entered a plane to deport 101 Malian refugees. Similarly, Balladur's 1993-95 government repealed the 'drot do sol', i.e. French citizenship for those born in France of non-French parents, family reunion laws, and gave the police stop-and search powers.

Le Pen has earned notoriety for his remarks on the holocaust and his staunch opposition to immigration.<sup>45</sup> He has an extremely loose tongue and gave public vent to any stray train of vituperative thought that snaked its way through his mind, articulating what was hitherto left unsaid. Therefore, he saw Nazi death camps as just a "detail of history". Known for his anti-Arab and Anti-Semitic views, Le Pen has campaigned for the expulsion of foreigners, saying they take away jobs from the French and dilute French culture.

The spectacular success of the *Front National* in the European elections of 1984 is explained in a variety of ways. Proportional representation made it possible for parties without large following nevertheless to campaign nationwide rather than concentrate only on areas of strength. This compared to the two ballot system prevailing in domestic elections in France, gave an advantage to small parties and to electoral novices like the National Front.<sup>46</sup>

Questions about the considerations that influenced the decision to vote for the *Front National* systematically reveal the problem of immigration and the

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<sup>45</sup> *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), 24 April 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.4, p.64.

feeling of insecurity as the major factors. This ability of Le Pen to understand the fear in the minds of people and to speak the unspeakable makes him people's hero. By touching on the collective fear and anxiety of millions of people and speaking for them in a way that a respectable politician would never do, he attracts the attention of the mass. It is the threatening sense of loss of identity that Le Pen has tapped into consistently over the years. By his usual skill of touching the problem in a way that puts every one else on the defensive, he knows that the more panic he can create, the more chance there is that people will take his views seriously.<sup>47</sup>

The *Front National* however despite having MEPs holding municipal office and arriving second in presidential elections, had never joined a national government and had only been represented once in the National Assembly from 1986 to 1988 (The 1986 legislative election was the only one held under proportional representation, allowing the front 35 deputies until 1988).

What is needed is a more finely – tuned accounts which can explain the uneven contemporary resurgence of the extreme right – and offer pointers to whether this represents a fundamental crisis of party systems. French polls of 2002 is a lesson for all democracies. Large sections of political, intellectual and social France have rallied behind the only mainstream candidate, Chirac. But if France and other democracies – do not learn the right lessons, the spectre of extremism can always return. Le Pen had won

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<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Harris, *The Dark Side of Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), n.6, pp.78-79.

15 per cent of the first round in 1995. This time, he managed 16.86 per cent. Therefore, it is not true that there has been a significant increase in the support for far right. What has happened is that voters have become increasingly fed up with mainstream politicians. A record 30 per cent obtained in the first round.

The dissatisfaction is what needed to be tackled. Mainstream political parties must realize from the French example how they can cede space to extremists in the even of prolonged non-performance. Issues like immigration, majority / minorities conflicts, economic liberalism versus welfare and labour “rights” need deft handling which may have to include some pain speaking. If mainstream politician do not squarely and sensibly address uncomfortable issues, demagogues reap the benefits. An example from the French campaign was Chirac’s and Jospin’s harping on law and order. The two candidates actually wanted to talk of France’s immigrant-dominated, crime-ridden, poor suburbs. But they seldom did. All politicians should perhaps learn from Margaret Thatcher, whose blunt speaking did not make her an “extremist”.

This challenge has to be tackled at the political level, and can no longer be dismissed as a mere protest vote which will disappear in course of time.<sup>48</sup> Above all, France’s politicians might take the 2002 Presidential election results as a warning of what happens when government institutions, and

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<sup>48</sup> Balveer Arora, “France: The Election Victory of the Left”, *World Focus*, vol.18, no.8, August 1997, pp.9-11.

bureaucratic decision-making, drift too far from local communities and gross rolls democracy. The vast majority of French voters do not really want an extremist President, but neither do they want to perpetuate a political system whose leaders appear to party them to little heed.

Mainstream political parties have to find ways to reconnect with voters. While increasing crime in French streets and echoes of the Middle East conflict provided Le Pen with a boost, the real opening for him came from the narrowing of the once formidable ideological gap separating France's traditional parties. After three decades at the top of the political tree and months from his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, Chirac, a politician known for his appetite for power and fixed ideas, now finds himself the symbol of morality and democracy. His victory contains one message: He can claim little personal glory from the defeat of Le Pen.

Arabs and Jews around the world must be dismayed by the success of a man who has for decades blamed Arab immigrants for crime and unemployment problems and who once described gas chambers as no more than a "detail" in the history of World War II. In the United States, Le Pen's victory was not likely to enhance trust in France, an ally that has its problems in Washington in the best of times.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps aghast at the support the Front was receiving from its traditional working heartlands, the Communist Party

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<sup>49</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, 24 April 2002.

has also been prepared to use language more associated with the extreme right.

To sum up, the impact of the Front, France has seen a radicalization of both civil and political society. Whilst civil society has largely demonized the party, political society has flirted with the extreme right, changing its policies to win over its voters. As a result, a tough line on immigration has become commonplace amongst the French politics establishment. The establishment will be heartened by the current divisions on the French extreme right. However, it would be foolish to write off the undeniably weakened Front. Its impact will continue to be felt. Whilst the French extreme right may now be going through a period of transition and decomposition, and the future of the *Front National* and the Mouvement National Republicain appears uncertain there is no denying the impact that the former has made in France.

There is the other political threat: the continuing ascent of the National Front. The government has made some progress in legalizing 'illegal' immigrants, but the fear and passion that the FN feeds upon are lurking under the surface, a strong under current which could upset many calculations if the social and political climate were to further deteriorate. Le Pen cannot simply be wished from French politics.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**



The revival of right wing extremist party *Front National*, in France has attracted considerable attention of political scientists. Some say, however, the result has been misread both by the Press and by politicians in Europe. It has been portrayed as being new and national in nature, with shock and indignation directed at France and the French. In reality, it is both older and more widespread as a phenomenon, and is more representative of the increasing failure of the political system than the success of the F.N. The writing has been on the wall for a decade and more.

Although the *Front National* of France was formed in 1972 it achieved its electoral success only in the 1980s. Their programmes are more or less similar to its predecessors. Throughout the 1980 and the 1990s the FN has played on a series of significant themes. Even though in the initial stages it was formed ostensibly to deter the spread of communism, its political agenda shifted towards “immigrants versus the nationals”. That is in doctrinal terms the FN has remained consistent in its emphases towards France and the French people. For its 1995 presidential campaign, the French people, and not immigrants was the slogan. This philosophy obviously has severe implications and ramifications.

It saw in immigrants as easy targets for all the problems of society: unemployment among the nations was because of immigrants who took up unskilled jobs at low pay; the social welfare benefits were reduced to the citizens and taxes were increased in order to improve the conditions of the

immigrants. They also became an object of attack of the extreme Right when it came to crime. Therefore, their campaign included a ban on new immigration, end of family regrouping and expulsion of those who are unemployed and of those who were convicted in criminal cases. They demanded for the preference of nationals over immigrants in all areas.

It is apprehensive of losing their national identity in a centralised Europe. This threat to national independence is extended to the cultural aspect too. The party argues that the increase in the number of immigrants, which could be the result of eastward enlargement, would undermine the countries culture, heritage and identity. However, its campaign during the European election include calls for the Europe of Fatherland and for the preservation of the unique European identity. Thus, FN's present aim is "to preserve diversity within while fending off diversity from outside".<sup>1</sup>

The *Front national* has transformed itself into a well organised and structured political machine, capable of outliving Le Pen, instead of being as in the past just a rag-bag of the discontented. On the question of a federal Europe it is too fast and too far for the FN. There is certain irony in all this. Le Pen's nationalism "squares ill with the commitment made by most members of the Strasbourg parliament to the cause of the European Union. Furthermore, the prospect of the further strengthening of the

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Fieschi, "European Institutions: The Far Right and Illiberal Politics in a Liberal Contest", *Parliamentary Affairs* (Liverpool), vol.53 (2000), p.521.

European Community could perhaps provide the *Front National* with a real opportunity to increase its representation”.<sup>2</sup>

Considerable socio-economic changes have been taking place in Western Europe. However, it is a serious mistake to argue that these processes alone can offer an explanation for the rise of the extreme Right. These changes are affecting all West European states, but only some have major extreme Right parties. Moreover, these movements have often made sudden breakthroughs, a trait which is hard to explain by a primarily socio-structural argument.<sup>3</sup>

The *Front National* claims to be anti-establishment. According to the FN, the declining economic and political situation is a result of the inefficiency of the main political parties and their failure to effectively implement policies. By speaking out the existing ‘fear’ in the minds of the people, they attack the ruling parties. This widespread and amplifying fear, suspicion and hostility towards them has enabled extreme Right wing activists to find an easy and ‘acceptable’ quarry in their political hunt.

On the first two issues, the “prescription is straightforward: rulers must avoid fueling the political fringes by succumbing to sleaze, and must do more to contain crime. But the third issue is trickier. France is not about to renounce the Euro, nor end its enthusiasm for European integration. Yet its

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Sutton, “France: Who Beats the Nationalist Drum?”, *World Today* (London), vol.47, no.6, 1991, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Eatwell, “The Rebirth of ‘Extreme-Right’ in Western Europe?”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.53, 2000, p.418.

political elites need to do a better job of explaining these global forces to voters”.<sup>4</sup>

As in other countries in Europe, sovereignty is being eroded simultaneously on two fronts. Globalisation is remaking the economy. French companies and workers are venturing overseas, a large slice of the stock exchange is owned by foreigners, and foreign firms such as McDonald’s are winning eager French consumers. At the same time, the European Union adds a political dimension to these economic forces. Thanks to the Euro, the French government has entirely lost its ability to pursue an independent monetary policy and has accepted serious constraints on its fiscal policy.<sup>5</sup>

Another factor that helps shape the relationship between the people and parliament is the long tradition of less-than-enthusiastic support for the political class, or their political institutions, which at times has boiled over into open and violent hostility. The popularity of figures such as General Boulanger during the Third Republic, Marshall Plan in 1940, Pierre Poujade in the late 1950s Pierre Mendes France in the early 1950s, Charles de Gaulle through out much of the postwar era until his death, and more recently Raymond Barre and Jean-Marie Le Pen and his *Front National*.<sup>6</sup>

Jean-Marie Le Pen continues to represent, a convenient target which could be blamed for all political failures or the social and economic consequences

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<sup>4</sup> *International Herald Tribune* (Paris), 8 May 2002.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 May 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Franco Rizzuto, “France: Something of a Rehabilitation”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.50, no.3, 1997, p. 374.

of economic modernisation. Today the FN claims to be the “second political force” in France after the Parti Socialiste (PS) and also the only authentic opposition movement. In all areas of policy the FN cry was, “But where is the change?” – the Chirac presidency has been attacked for its record on unemployment and its military reforms. Interestingly through, the FN was quick to defend Chirac on his controversial nuclear testing policy; for Le Pen and his nationalist movement this matter involved a vital national interest which, in their view, outweighed all other considerations. For the most part, however, the FN has sought to undermine President Chirac, and the publicity slogan, “Chirac is a failure, Le Pen is right”. Lionel Jospin’s administration has also come under attack.

According to Chantal Monffe, the party has been able to articulate the demands of the common people because of its populist rhetoric. It tries to present itself as the only guarantors of the sovereignty of the people.<sup>7</sup>

Modern-day FN is its reputation and notoriety. Fundamentally, the party actually seems to thrive on controversy. Its hard line platform on immigration and law and order. Le Pen himself has become the centre of various scandals and allegations, most notably over his description of the holocaust as a “detail” in the history of the Second World War.

However, FN’s support to the Nazi past and its policies have been the greatest drawback. Even though the party reject the extremist label, its

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver Machart, “The ‘Fourth way’ of the Ultra-Right-Austria, Europe and the End of Neo-Corporatism”, *Capital and Class* (London), vol.73 (2000), pp.11-12.

leaning to the Nazi policies is very evident in the speeches of its leaders and their rallies. FN's rejection of human rights, its racist propaganda and anti-Semitic remarks, its often revisionist stance and aggressive populist discourses leave little doubt about its place on the far- right.

Another factor which attracts the people towards the extreme Right parties is the party's leader himself. Jean-Marie Le Pen is a good elocuter. He attracts the attention of the media and the people with his exclusive speeches and interviews. He can speak the unspeakable truths of society which makes him 'favourite' of the electorate. He actually perverts language for his own ends. This perhaps is a point of fundamental significance. The party has been very much associated with Le Pen's personal and authorization leadership. Various studies have shown how the original president of the party has maintained his iron grip.

At the same time, however, we must acknowledge that today the FN stands as an entirely modern and professional political formation. It was the first French political party to have its own Internet website and its output of publicity material is not only unremitting but impressive in its scope and production quality. The FN also has an ability to target, and then tap into, a variety of constituencies and audiences. For the educated and literary, there is now a lecture series, a pseudo-academic review, *Identite*, and a publishing house, *Editions Nationals*, committed to 'cultural combat' through literature. Down market, as it were, there are now cartoon histories of Le Pen, a

multitude of stickers and slogans, and a special boutique stocked up with FN key rings, perfume, badges, handkerchiefs and low ties. And during the World Cup in France there was a selection of clever, tailor-made campaign slogans: “For France to win, a red card for the Euro”, “With the Euro France will remain on the touch line”. Here, for sure, is the ultimate in modern political combat.

Expansion of the success of the extreme Right includes an analysis of who votes for them, why do they vote for them and where do they come from. This includes three aspects broadly- the economic, political and geographic. While there is a consistency in the socio-professional and geographical profile of the Front National’s constituency, Jean-Marie Le Pen became the best catch-all candidate: He is the one that most crosses the classes, with a mix of all ages and all social categories. Most of the votes who support the extreme right are young, uneducated and low skilled, mostly from the age group of 18-35.

Their intention to vote could be connected to the issue of immigration. They see immigrants, who take unskilled jobs at low pay, as competitors. The extreme Right parties preach from their stand point and demand implementation of policies to deal with such problems. They include curbing immigration and expulsion of unemployed immigrants. They are seen as the only solution. Whenever the issue of immigration has come up, like that of the Islamic headscarf issue in 1989 in France. The extreme Right has fared

in the elections better compared to the rest of the parties. More men seem to vote for the extreme Right parties than the women. They seem to be more chauvinistic than the other parties. Their views on family, working women, abortion, etc. are more conservative and outdated.

The political aspects also helped the extreme Right parties to an extent. Whenever the economy was undergoing a bad phase, the political situation was in turmoil and the parties were doing very little to improve the conditions, the extreme Right have performed better. This could be seen from the very first success of the FN in the 1984 elections. This is known as the 'protest effect' when the extreme Right parties attract voters from the central right parties. In the recent past, this has been considered more important than the issue of immigration in strengthening their position in the country.

However, the protest vote thesis has a variety of problems. One stems from the fact that it is possible to make both a protest and a rational choice in terms of voting. For the protest theory to hold as the major explanation, it would be necessary, firstly, for voters to choose a party which is not ideologically close to them and, secondly, to have no interest in whether the party is likely to exercise influence. Neither condition appears to be correct. Extremist voters are most typically holistic nationalists, but often they will not support a party with such an ideology if its prospects seem hopeless.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Eatwell, vol.53, p.419.



Another aspect which helps the extreme Right to gain large support in the type of electoral system. In France, the proportional system of voting replaced the first-pass-the post system in the 1986 elections. This gave an opportunity for FN to hold campaign throughout the country than concentrating the areas where it already enjoyed a considerable support. As a result, Le Pen's party experienced unexpected results in that election.

The geographical analysis once again could be connected to the issue of immigration. The extreme Right parties draw their support from the regions which have a high concentration of foreign population. This could be based on the facts that the largest share of the vote to the FN comes from regions like-Toulon, Marscille, Dreux etc. With slogans like "Two million unemployed equals two million immigrants, too many", they appeal to the xenophobia on which they base their success.

Thus, success in ballot box depends on various factors – absence of an attractive alternative for Right wing voters, the economic circumstances and political crises. Moreover, sympathy for extreme Right is apparent not only in social structure and in problems of modern society but also in a particular kind of personality structures.

However, an analysis of the regional, national and the European elections show that the voting pattern change with each election. Most often it is seen that an extreme Right party like the FN performs better in regional elections.

But the same does not hold good when it is about the national level elections. Even voters who consider themselves sympathetic to the extreme Right do not prefer to vote for the same at the national level. Because electoral success for the extreme Right parties depend on the ability to mobilize potential support, as the propaganda skills of the leadership and on the economic and political circumstances in which parliamentary elections take place. In normal circumstances, it appears that most voters who consider themselves on the extreme Right will give their support to centre right parties like the Gaullist Rassemblement pour la Republique (RPR)– Union for a Democratic France (UDF) in France.<sup>9</sup>

The elections for the European Parliament provide an obvious chance for extreme Right elements, as the public has very little idea of the role and function of the institution for which they are required to elect members.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, it is from these elections that the parties have gained enormously – despite their anti-Europeanism. Moreover, the European elections have given them success to a considerable extent which domestic electoral system could not provide. The FN which always had below marginal marks, achieved its first electoral success in the 1984 European elections when it gained ten seats in the European Parliament.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Geaffrey Harris, *The Dark side of Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p.161.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, p.135.

<sup>11</sup> Fieschi, n.2, pp.521-2.

It is considered whether the performance of Le Pen and his party in 2002, in both the presidential and parliamentary elections, is nothing more than a blip or if it constitutes a truly seismic shift which poses a real threat to liberal democracy. In this context, it must also be asked whether there is a fundamental malaise at the heart of the Fifth Republic which has allowed Le Pen to come so close to securing power. The threats from without, including globalisation, immigration and the European integration, appear to be stretching the constitutional structures of the Fifth Republic in such a way that it is struggling to cope with internal matters. Should the regime disintegrate into crisis, it can only be believed that the FN will exploit this for whatever it is worth.

FN have never been altogether sure whether the movement should remain a party of protest. Le Pen himself has never had any doubts that it should seek power. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin vaunted the merits of the European Union, whereas Le Pen happily revealed his anti-Semitism. Jospin believed that to address such matters was to descend to the level of gutter politics, whereas Le Pen electioneering was its usual crude sloganeering, Jospin hesitated and failed to use the media to its full potential. The flourishing of the far Right was to move politics towards this end of the political spectrum and to condemn in outright terms the unashamed racism of Le Pen's supporters.

Despite critics charges that his name is a byword for bigotry and bullying, Jean-Marie Le Pen has led his *Front National* Party from virtually nowhere - 0.74 percent of the vote in 1974 - to a stunning success in 2002 with appeals to voters' fears about crime and immigration.<sup>12</sup>

Since the presidential elections of 2002, President Jacques Chirac and his advisers have promised to fight crime and cut taxes. But they should also rethink the way they talk about both kinds of challenge to French sovereignty. They must recognise economic globalisation as inevitable and make a positive argument for it, otherwise politicians of both fringes will turn voters against it. And they need to go about the European integration with more regard for public misgivings. If the error with economic globalisation has been to pretend that it isn't really happening and to neglect to defend it, the error with the European project has been to assert its inevitability and assume its popular acceptance.<sup>13</sup>

The rise of extremist movements raised a question – whether there was any challenge to liberal democracy. They are taking advantage no doubt of the very openness of political democracy and unresolved issues of identity, ethnicity, and religion in their pursuit of power, advocates issues not articulated by major parties. By the oratorical skills of Le Pen and the attention lavished on him by the media, the *Front National* could present itself as a national alternative with remarkable success.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 23 April 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 8 May 2002.

Thus, the rise of the *Front National* since the early 1980s has both economic as well as social causes. The cities and regions which have experienced rapid economic development have also witnessed a series of social problems, including the arrival of an inadequately integrated immigrant population, unemployment, the general decay of public facilities, roving bands of idle youth, delinquency, and the class of cultures in everyday life. In this context, the immigrant becomes the prime target of hostility.<sup>14</sup>

The electorate of the FN changed its nature to some extent as it grew. In 1984 the FN did relatively well in the wealthy districts. This surge in support for the *Front National* can be explained by the combination of good constituency work by the party in the area, the growing reputation of its candidate, and a national political climate favorable to the *Front National*. The debate on the Islamic headscarf had presented all the established political parties with a dilemma. Marie-France Stirbois gave prominence to that controversy in her campaign, and Le Pen repeated the theme in his political meetings in the constituency. Faced with this steep increase in the support for the extreme Right, all parties except the ecologists called for a concerted effort to stop the rise of the *Front National*. All the parties bear some responsibility for the success of the FN. This undoubtedly led many on the right to express their disappointment by voting for Le Pen and for those on the left to abstain in 2002 presidential elections.

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<sup>14</sup> Pierre Brechon and Subrata Kumar Mitra, "National Front in France: The Emergence of Extreme Right Protest Movement", *Comparative Politics* (New York), vol.25, no.1, October 1992, p.70.

Is Le Pen's the authentic voice of a France that claims it is heir to the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity endangered by the Enlightenment? Or do those ideas mask a culture that is becoming irrational, exclusivist and deeply racist?. The growth of the protest vote is not a recent phenomenon, but the first round of the presidential elections of 21 April 2002 turned into a festival of protest. The candidates from extremist parties or parties outside the system obtained unprecedented results.<sup>15</sup> But in general the old parties have stayed large and insurgents have been defused. It is similarly important not to overstate the recent electoral success of the extreme Right.

A study of the 2002 presidential election results reveals that the relationship between Left and Right had not really changed since the 1995 election: indeed it shows a remarkable consistency.<sup>16</sup> His 16.9 per cent was hardly a great leap forward for the extreme Right given that he had polled 15.3 per cent in the previous (1995) presidential ballot. It was only remarkable if compared with the low aggregate vote of 9 per cent which the extreme Right achieved in the European Parliament election of 1999 following the Le Pen - Megret split in 1998. Even if Megret's 2.3 per cent presidential vote is added to Le Pen's, the extreme right at 19.2 per cent was up only 3.9 per cent on its last presidential showing. It was Prime Minister Jospin's failure to mobilize the Left that put Le Pen into the second ballot, as much as Le

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<sup>15</sup> Arnauld Miguet, "The French Election of 2002", *West European Politics*, vol.25, no.4, October 2002, p.212.

<sup>16</sup> Miguet, n.4, p.210.

Pen's augmentation of his own electorate that ensured Jospin's elimination.<sup>17</sup>

Democracy is safe in France despite the rise of the *Front National*, but from the point of view of immigrants France has certainly become less liberal, compared to the high point reached after the victory of the United Front of the Left in the presidential elections of 1981. In their attempts to fend off the challenge of the *Front National*, politicians of all parties have started using some of its language. This is seen both in the volatility of public opinion and in the politicians preference for hedging their bets on the issue of rights of immigrant workers. The consequence is a general hardening of attitudes on the issue of immigration.<sup>18</sup>

Some trace F.N.'s rise to that of method of election system in France proportional representation that has allowed extremist parties to gain a foothold in the political system. Proportional electoral system make life easier for small parties and, in the main, right-wing extremist parties continue to be small competitors. But, this has made F.N. suffer in the two rounds majority system. The golden rule in majority voting system: the first round is about choice, the second about elimination.

Many extreme Right voters look for stability and predictability in political life. In a world, which involves processes like migration and formation of a

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<sup>17</sup> David S. Bell and Byron Criddle, "Presidentialism Restored: The French Elections of April-May and June 2002", *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol.55, no.4, Oct.2002, pp.643-55.

<sup>18</sup> Brechon and Mitra, n.1, p.79.

number of international organisation, it is difficult to offer a permanent solution. But the hope for a better and secure world inspires the people to vote for these extreme Right parties. However, a well planned programme – within a particular country and internationally, should protect the countries from the threat of rise of extreme Right parties.

The extreme Right parties and their racist policies are not new to Europe. Contemporary events confirm that the ideas of fascist and racist politicians were not just the product of a particular historical period or something which appealed only to parts of Europe. Although they were prominent in the inter-war period, they have grown and have played an important role in the domestic as well as the European politics. The racist ideas propagated by them are dangerous to the society as a whole and increases violence, hatred and insecurity. To tackle this problem, it is necessary that social, economic and political situation existing in the society have to be improved rather than just planning out how to control them electorally.

The European Union's real problem in dealing with Right wing extremism lies not in an argument about toughness, but in the absence of mutual trust. The fears of the EC member states are different and their historic links with the rest of the world incompatible. Each member state of the EC has followed its own immigration and refugee policy, including its own integration policy, and there are large differences between their



approaches.<sup>19</sup> Most European countries have experienced serious problems integrating immigrant and ethnic minority populations. The number of Muslims in Western Europe already exceeds ten million, and it is growing. All the Western democracies, in one form or another, face immigration pressures from the developing world that are unlikely to abate. The clash of cultures that some have predicted for the next century may not take place at the frontiers where these cultures meet, but rather, as events in France suggest, inside the borders of the Western states.<sup>20</sup>

Neither better border controls nor other restrictive measures will prevent illegal immigrants from coming to Western Europe in considerable numbers unless the root causes which give rise to migration are addressed. This can be achieved only by targeted development aid, liberalized trade and a massive investment strategy. Member states of the European Union are now turning to identifying ways in which aid and development programmes should be restructured in order to create the conditions necessary to promote economic growth in sending countries, while reducing the pressure to immigrate. They should introduce policies to integrate the second generation immigrants, allowing dual nationality, liberalizing of naturalization laws, and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation.

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<sup>19</sup> Rajendra K. Jain, "Fortifying the Fortress: Immigration and Politics in the European Union", *International Studies*, vol.34, no.17, April-June 1997, p.174.

<sup>20</sup> Milton Vilton, "Muslims in France", *Foreign Affairs*, vol.75, no.5, 1996, p.96.

On the other hand, nations must also overcome its economic, social, political, moral, and cultural shortcomings if it is to successfully face its other challenges. The rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen's extreme right *Front National* is symptomatic of France's internal difficulties. To combat them, France must, in essence, transcend itself. Since the days of Alexis de Tocqueville, France has been described as a country forced into revolution by its inability to reform. Although today's France is not about to revolt, it is suffering from alack of hope for the future, which in large part explains the success of right groups like the *Front National*.<sup>21</sup>

France is probably sicker politically than is generally thought. The fact that large numbers of the French have thrown their support behind Le Pen's *Front National*, which is highly represented in the country's regional assemblies, indicated that the people of France have reached the end of their tether. Grippped by despair over their country's high unemployment rate and declining importance in the world, they have begun to cast their lot with the exceptionalists, in a wistful but dangerous attempt to recapture France's past glory.<sup>22</sup>

However, more responsibility lies with the political parties and with the people of respective countries. The center –Right parties of late have been adopting tactics to increase their vote share. In order to shift the attention of the people from the consumption charges of their ministers and their

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<sup>21</sup> Dominique Moisi, "Trouble with France", *Foreign Affairs*, vol.77, no.3, May-June 1998, p.102.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, n.3, p.103.

inefficiency. They started blaming immigrants for all the drawbacks of society. However, it could be more of a responsible act if they realize their loopholes in administration and instead of adopting far-right stance, they should be bringing about effective policies to solve the existing problems of society. They should also introduce programs which would encourage awareness of history so that the young see the deadly danger that exists behind a certain type of political appeal.

As the extreme Right parties mostly appeal to the young generation, it is the responsibility of the local authorities to key a check on the extremist activity within schools. But the most important task would be the development of a multi-racial society, rather making the simple citizens aware of the need for it. The need for it is important from a two angles: it is apparent that European economic need for immigration is a continuing reality. Most of the countries of Europe face a low death rate and low birth rate which has turned the demographic pyramid upside down i.e., to say that a big groups of people consist of the older people. This is leading to labour shortage in certain industries and regions. Immigration, therefore is not only a result of attractive life style and high living standard of Europe but is very often a response to the needs of the labour market.<sup>23</sup> The development of a multiracial and multicultural Europe is now an economic and political necessity. Just as politicians have learnt to talk positively about the need to

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<sup>23</sup> Harris, n.4, p.176.

build up Europe's independence and economic strength, they must realize and encourage the need for a multiracial Europe.

The need of the hour is to check the growth of the extreme Right parties, not only because they reduce the overall level of tolerance, but also because some democratic parties are trying to curtail the success of extreme Right by taking over some of their ideas. This development is dangerous for Europe. The last time they were in power, the countries had experienced complete distraction and nobody prefers to repeat such nightmare. It is therefore necessary to realize the existence of the extreme Right parties and the threat prevailing from them.

The FN is a serious and potentially very powerful force in French political life. There is little chance of the FN coming to power on its own, and the major center-right parties have been reluctant to work it even at the local levels. With mixed fortunes of the *Front National*, the nationalist movement and political party headed by Jean-Marie Le Pen, today it holds no more than one seat in the national assembly. As things stand, the FN presents no immediate danger as a candidate for the succession.

Thus reduced to a weak movement presently, what will happen in the future remain extremely unpredictable. What he represents cannot be washed away or dismissed as a passing fashion. Le Pen responds to the national crisis and that is where his strength lies. As Jean Pierre Chevenmen puts it: "He represents the feeling of a relative decline, unfortunately all too real". Since

the early 1970s he has talked in public about range of issues that no one else has wanted to touch: most notably, immigration, AIDS and the Jews.

The challenge of the continuing rise of the *Front National* has to be tackled at the political level. It can no longer be dismissed as a mere protest vote which will disappear in course of time since it does not rely on one single constituency for support. The *Front National* is a movement which will always have some kind of future in French politics and it has altered the parameters of political debate in France.

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