

Le Pen is Chief Beneficiary of Corporate Globalisation

The rise of the far-right across Europe and elsewhere, of which Le Pen is but the latest and most high-profile example, has met with a predictable barrage of outrage and political hand-wringing amongst Europe's mainstream politicians. Tony Blair describes the policies of Le Pen's *Front National* as "repellent" while Jacques Chirac refuses a TV debate with Le Pen on the grounds that "Faced with the hatred and intolerance [of Mr. Le Pen], no arrangement is possible, there is no compromise and there is no possible debate". Blair went on to declare that it is "vitally important that people who believe in democracy, who loathe those policies of racism and narrow-minded nationalism fight it at every level". And so politicians once again implore citizens to stop shunning the polling stations and to play a more active part in politics.

Well, if Blair is true to his word, he'll no doubt be asking himself why many ordinary people in and outside France are concerned with rising crime and immigration; why they feel so threatened and why mainstream politicians seem incapable of offering solutions? If, as we are led to believe, support for Le Pen largely represents merely a "protest vote", that can only be because mainstream political parties in France and elsewhere are failing to adequately represent the poor, the unemployed, the threatened and the marginalised. And since this phenomenon is occurring not just in France, but across Europe and even further afield, it cannot simply be put down to some quirk or inadequacy of the French electoral system or to those of other countries. Furthermore, voter apathy which is said to have contributed to Le Pen's success, is equally a phenomenon which reaches well beyond French and European borders. But good news is at hand for our politicians if they will only look to see it! For there is an inextricable link between "voter apathy", the concerns of the marginalised who protest by seeking 'simple' far-right solutions, and those on the left who protest in the streets of Seattle, Genoa and elsewhere. Why? Quite simply because those sections of society are no longer represented since genuine democracy can no longer be said to exist. In short, they've been disenfranchised.

Now politicians - and perhaps many readers - might at first find such a statement ridiculous. After all, we have elections, don't we? Indeed we do. And they're free and fair, aren't they? Indeed they are. But does that necessarily mean we have 'democracy'? For democracy surely implies not just the *mechanics* of free and fair elections but the ability of different political parties to choose and, if elected, to implement their freely chosen manifestos. On the face of it, this may appear to be the case. But we need to look a little deeper to uncover some of the reasons for the protests of both the left in Genoa, Gothenburg and Davos who decry corporate globalisation and of the poor, unemployed and marginalised who are apt to be taken in by the facile, manipulative and racist rhetoric of those such as Le Pen. So what can possibly underlie these twin forms of protest and the scourge of voter apathy when the mechanics of democracy seem, by all accounts, to be in good working order?

Anti-Democratic Global Competition

The answer is because today's competitive global economy subtly yet effectively reduces the span of feasible policy options open to political parties once they come to govern. Today we live in a global and largely borderless economy where capital and transnational corporations freely move wherever profits are highest, costs lowest and where governments live in fear of the 'reaction' of global markets. No government, whatever party may be in power, can now impose significantly higher taxes or regulations on corporations for fear of them moving employment elsewhere. Similarly, governments seeking to impose protective environmental or labour legislation or higher taxes on corporations to help the unemployed or under-privileged in society would be seen by global financial markets as 'uncompetitive', prompting instant punishment through devaluation, capital flight, inflation and unemployment. Even the mere mooted of such policies would cause the computers of market traders to instantly move capital to some other economy offering better prospects for greater profits.

Democracy presupposes that political parties can freely represent *and implement* policies which reflect a wide diversity of public opinion and consequently a wide range of feasible measures covering the entire political spectrum. But globally competitive markets now represent a sinister and significant anti-democratic force which squeezes the feasible policy parameters to what has now become a highly restricted, business-friendly band which excludes all those restorative policies traditionally espoused by the political Left and the marginalised to balance social and environmental concerns against those of business. The free movement of capital and corporations thus forces nation states into competition with one another to maintain inward investment and so protect jobs. But in their quest to maintain their 'international competitiveness', they must progressively down-level social and environmental protection, increase privatisation, cut public services, compete in lowering taxes and so on to maintain an economic environment 'conducive to business needs'. All of this translates into a deteriorating environment, a rapidly expanding gulf between rich and poor, an unraveling of social cohesion and, as Le Pen's success once again demonstrates, a tendency – albeit wholly misguided - for under-privileged sections of society to resort to far-right political parties. While the French stand bewildered at the rise of Le Pen, the English cannot rest easy with the memory of riots in northern English cities still fresh in their minds. And neither can millions in other countries across the world who likewise witness the unmistakable rise of the far-right.

So at a time when the gap between rich and poor is at its greatest, when job security is at its weakest and when centre-left governments around the world should consequently be at the peak of their effectiveness in responding fully to the concerns of the poor and marginalised, the competition induced by the free movement of capital and corporations systematically prevents them from implementing the necessary policies of wealth re-distribution and higher social and environmental protection. As such, it should not surprise us that traditional centre-left parties around the world such as Old Labour, having been forced to abandon these traditional policies, have consequently re-positioned themselves - under the cover of 'Third Way' or other appropriate spin - more towards the right: just where the competitive dictates of global markets determine that they or any other party seeking power must be. Blair, Schroder and other mainstream politicians, rather like poorly-disguised transvestite parodies of Mrs. Thatcher, thus tout much the same business and market-oriented policies while France's left-wing political parties, faced with Le Pen, are left in the embarrassingly comical position of having to call on voters to vote for their erstwhile centre-right enemy, Jacques Chirac.

Globally mobile capital spotlights the Far-Right

It is as if democracy could be portrayed as a theatre stage with politicians and their parties as the actors spread across the stage from left to right. In genuine democratic conditions, the spotlights would light the entire stage giving the audience (i.e. the electorate) a clear and illuminated view or choice across the entire political spectrum. But the fierce competition between nation states engendered by globally mobile capital and corporations has interfered with the lighting system such that only the right half of the stage remains illuminated leaving the left in total darkness and its actors invisible. Both the actors finding themselves shrouded in darkness and the electorate seeing a restricted stage thus unwittingly and automatically shift their stance or gaze towards the illuminated area of the stage on the right. Whilst the shift of traditional left-of-centre parties towards the right is usually seen merely as a function of party-political expediency, we should be aware of the underlying anti-democratic forces at work. As such, both those voters to the left of centre and the poor and unemployed who see their livelihoods under threat are today effectively deprived of political expression and of their democratic rights. So is it any wonder they take to the streets or to the Le Pens of this world in protest? And is it any wonder voters shun the ballot box in droves when global competition dictates that which ever party we vote for, the policies delivered inevitably end up being the same market and corporate-friendly measures merely 'spun' in different clothing? That politicians implore citizens to defend democracy when it was politicians themselves who hollowed it out by effectively surrendering it to the demands of globally mobile capital is surely the height of hypocrisy. If anyone is to blame for the rise of the far-right, it is our mainstream politicians: Blair, Jospin, Schroder and their ilk who continue to de-regulate global markets; and Reagan, Thatcher and Clinton before them. Indeed, it is surely high time people spoke out and told our blind politicians that their so-called "democracy" has become little more than a market and corporate-dominated pseudo-

democracy; one in which politicians have become but the pseudo-democratic puppets of globally mobile capital; the pawns in a game of destructive global competition which no nation can win and, as growing global problems such as global warming and the rise of the far-right show, we are all likely to lose.

Escaping the Vicious Circle

If politicians want to halt and reverse the rise of the far-right and wish to lead us once again according to genuine democratic principles, they must stop spinning and start co-operating with one another to expose and disarm the anti-democratic forces of transnational capital and corporations and the intense international economic competition their free movement has set in train; a vicious circle of destructive competition which prevents politicians from implementing the urgent measures needed to solve mounting global and local problems. Politicians must therefore co-operate to re-impose capital controls and higher taxes and environmental standards on corporations. They must co-operate to use the revenues raised to fund debt-free sustainable development and higher social and environmental standards in the South as well as to help the poor and socially excluded in the North. They must cancel Third-World debt and co-operate to raise taxes on currency speculators and impose the necessary restraints on their industries to reduce emissions. They must co-operate to ensure mutual security for all the world's nations and so remove the massive waste of the bulk of military spending. They must use the savings to help the Third World out of poverty and so arrest rampant population growth, the spread of Aids and other deadly diseases. In so doing, they will equally remove the need for migration and so stem the flow of asylum seekers. That way they will assuredly and successfully kill three birds with one stone by removing the grievances of both anti-corporate globalisation protestors and of those who protest by voting for the far-right. Furthermore, they'll succeed in restoring genuine democracy and so bring peoples all over the world back to the ballot box.

But in a globally competitive world, how are our leaders to achieve such goals? How can they fulfil their proper roles to lead the world from destructive competition to fruitful co-operation in which the good of each nation is contained in the good of all? What basis for co-operation could be found which provides the necessary means of delivering those objectives without risking the dangers of capital or corporate flight? Radically innovative yet practical ideas are now surfacing which show how politicians, the growing body of civil society activists, the socially excluded and apathetic voters can all begin to find answers to these questions. One such proposal is expressed in the initials 'SP' -- the Simultaneous Policy -- a new and achievable way of removing the barriers of fear and destructive competition which today prevent us all from finding solutions.

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