
France

An Italian-style shakeup of the system

by Christine Bierre

The results in France of the June 12 European Parliament election indicate a great potential for rapid devolution of the French political scene on the model of Italy, where all the traditional parties of the postwar period have vanished, virtually overnight. In France, the two main established political groupings, the UDF/RPR right-wing majority and the Socialist Party, both ended up with very poor results, while two dissident groups, Bernard Tapie's Radical Energy List and The Other Europe of Philippe de Villiers and Sir Jimmy Goldsmith, made considerable breakthroughs.

If the UDF/RPR is the absolute winner, with 25.5% of the vote, one can hardly call that a victory, especially since that electoral alliance had been credited by public opinion polls with 45% at the beginning of the race. The Socialist Party fared even worse: Their 14.5% is the most catastrophic result they have ever gotten, and there is a real question now whether Michel Rocard will be able to remain chairman of the party.

If those parties deserve to be the victims of a citizenry more and more fed up with their inability to deal with the economic crisis, the new forces appearing on the scene are even worse than what they are replacing.

Bernard Tapie, a corrupt 'folk hero'

Bernard Tapie is a variation on the Italian phenomenon of Silvio Berlusconi. Like the new Italian prime minister, Tapie is officially a "success story," having gone from childhood in France's poor suburbs to become a successful businessman. Tapie made his political career over the last few years, promoted by the Socialist Party. Two years ago, he held the post of Minister of the City in the national government, some six months before he had to resign in haste, just prior to his first indictment for corruption.

Tapie is one of the dirtiest individuals to have hit the political scene in a long time. He made his career in the 1970s as an asset stripper of the worst sort, buying up bankrupt companies for nothing, laying off personnel, restructuring and selling them for a bundle. Over the last couple of years, Tapie has had to face up to several indictments and legal investigations. After a first indictment accusing him of hav-

ing swindled a business partner of some 11 million francs, he now faces charges as head of the Marseille football team for corruption of players in an attempt to rig the game, as well as for embezzlement.

Why did he get 12.5% of the vote? After months of media lynching, Tapie comes across as a man tracked down by a system which is more and more hated by the population. Tapie, a kind of charismatic street fighter who has been fending off all attacks with incredible stamina, has become a kind of folk hero among workers, employees, and youth, drawing on sections of the population who no longer feel represented by the Socialist Party.

The Other Europe

The 12.5% attained by The Other Europe slate was also very surprising. This was not a protest vote, but a very deliberate vote against the Maastricht Treaty that created the European Union. De Villiers and Goldsmith benefitted from under-the-table support from the anti-Maastricht Gaullists, such as Interior Minister Charles Pasqua, President of the National Assembly Philippe Séguin, and the head of the RPR parliamentary group, Bernard Pons. From that standpoint, the de Villiers vote is an expression of significant and well-justified discontent with a supranational Europe.

The problem, however, comes in with the personalities of both de Villiers and Goldsmith, as well as with the number-four man on the slate, "anti-corruption" judge Thierry Jean Pierre, a trio which has the potential of destroying the French Republic.

Goldsmith, a high-flying financier with dual citizenship in Britain and France, became popular by striking a very sensitive chord in France: the fight against supranational institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Maastricht Treaty. On this basis, he first won over Rural Coordination, a national movement of farmers which had strongly campaigned against GATT, and later on, Philippe de Villiers, a Republican Party deputy from the Vendée, a strongly Catholic region, who was well known as a champion of "values."

The solutions proposed by Goldsmith's group to these urgent problems, however, are totally wrong. They want to create a Fortress Europe and a Fortress France, stopping the flow of immigration. This, they claim hypocritically, would be sufficient to stop the drug plague—yet they know very well that it is banks and such financial interests in the North which benefit the most from that traffic.

Even worse is the bucolic oligarchism of both Goldsmith and de Villiers. In a recent book, *The Trap*, Goldsmith proposes a New Age dream. He attacks science and technology, in particular nuclear power, as the source of evil in society, and calls instead for a "society rich in villages, in artisans, in a multitude of small and medium companies . . . founded on local development rather than on urban concentration," and developing a "non-intensive agriculture." Sir Jimmy's para-

dise comes with its own brand of spirituality and sacred rituals, namely those of the Amerindian religions, and explicitly opposes the Judeo-Christian religions and the mandate of Genesis, that man should be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the Earth.

Unfortunately, the bucolic ideology of Sir Jimmy has found an echo in the worst tendencies of de Villiers's own "defense of the soil," and the racist, anti-immigrant mentality typical of those right-wing Catholic circles who joined ranks with Marshal Pétain, the premier of Vichy France, during World War II. Thanks to Sir Jimmy, de Villiers has now become as anti-nuclear as he.

'Clean Hands,' but dirty politics

As if this cocktail were not bad enough, add to it Judge Thierry Jean Pierre, who joined the slate with the specific purpose of using it to launch a "Clean Hands" campaign against alleged corruption in France and in Europe as a whole, along the lines of what was done in Italy already, for purposes which had nothing to do with "corruption," but everything to do with political blackmail. Jean Pierre's hand is behind some of the most important scandals hitting the government of President François Mitterrand over the past

few years.

It was he who leaked to the press his investigations on the Pelat affair, one of the main reasons for the suicide of former Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy. Jean Pierre has just published a *Black Book on Corruption* in France, targeting the two main public works companies, CGE and Lyonnaise des Eaux-Dumez, as being responsible for 80% of the political corruption in the country. No sooner had this been done, than the report made the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*, provoking massive selling out of those companies on the part of London and New York investors. In the meantime, the City of London was awash with rumors that two officials of those companies were soon to be indicted, a campaign which was considerably reenforced by the Hollinger Corp.'s *Sunday Telegraph* in London.

"Will France Be the New Italy?" asked the *Sunday Telegraph* even before the results of the election were known. France can still avoid such a fate, on condition that the country is steered, as Gen. Charles de Gaulle once steered it, away from a chauvinist "defense of the soil," and is given a mission to bring economic, scientific, and technological progress to the world, and in particular, to the poorer nations of the planet.

What is the UNDP doing in your country?

It turns out that the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has gone into the business of running elections in sovereign countries. Case in point: Malawi. On May 17, ninety-year-old President Kamuzu Banda stepped down from office after a 30-year dictatorship. Enclaved and isolated from the world, Banda ran Malawi as a regimented society where the Malawi Congress Party reigned supreme. In 1971, Banda declared himself President for Life. But the ending of apartheid in South Africa, the extreme poverty and economic dependence of Malawi, and Banda's own deteriorating health, culminated in forcing him to bow to pressure from donor countries who were conditioning their aid on the introduction of "democratic governance" and a "free-market economy."

In stepped the UNDP to dictate the change. In July 1993, a representative of the UNDP, Australian judge Michael Kirby, presided over a constitutional conference with financial assistance from Britain. A new constitution was drawn up, without even the participation of Malawi nationals! A "United Nations Election Assistance Secretariat" was set up in the capital, Lilongwe, with regional

offices in the north and south of the country.

Banda, however, insisted on organizing a referendum on the principle of a return to multi-party politics, in which the President's grouping garnered only 37% for retaining a one-party system. In his wounded pride, Banda wanted to prove through the referendum that he was not capitulating to international pressure but to the will of the people. Eight parties contested the May 17 elections with three presidential candidates—Banda of the Malawi Congress Party; Cakufwa Chihana, an exiled trade unionist backed by the U.S. AFL-CIO; and Bakili Muluzi, imprisoned secretary general of Banda's party, who later created the United Democratic Front. Muluzi, a Muslim from the south, won the elections, and Banda conceded defeat.

The election is now being openly used as a feather in the cap of the UNDP. UNDP administrator James Gustave Speth wrote a letter to the *New York Times* to say that the Malawi elections show "the bright side of the United Nations." The UNDP, he said, has "been involved in practically all steps of the elections. . . . The United Nations helped organize the Malawi elections, including provision of support for human rights reforms that have also found a place in the country's new constitution"—which of course the UNDP wrote!

Now, who's really running Malawi?

—Lawrence Eyong-Echaw