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## **The French Antiglobalization Movement: a New French Exception?**

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## INTRODUCTION: BOVÉ-CHIRAC, FIGHTING FOR THE SAME CAUSE?

On the antiglobalization agenda, two of the big demonstrations scheduled this year will happen in France: one during the G8 summit in Evian in June and the other during the ESF, the European Social Forum in Paris and Saint-Denis in October-November. These events will certainly lure big crowds, exactly like in Genoa in July 2001 (G8 Summit) or in Florence in November 2002 (ESF). They remind us that France is one of the homeland and a leader of the antiglobalization movement. Everyone knows its heroes: the farmer José Bové or the pro-Tobin Tax association ATTAC, the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens.

The French government has announced that civil society would be closely associated to the preparation and the work of the G8 summit and that it would support financially if necessary the organization of the ESF. We can wonder if there is only one voice in France about globalization which would be rather opposed to this process: an official voice promoting a globalization with a human face, and a civil society voice emphasizing another globalization and another form of global governance. Are Bové and Chirac fighting for the same cause? And is Chirac a “Bové with an official face”?

## I) IS THE FRENCH ANTIGLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT REALLY UNIQUE?

The French antiglobalization movement exhibits specific features, but perhaps not as much as we might think. There is not really a French exception in that matter.

### **1) French Antiglobalization in the Global Mainstream**

Its features do not really differ from those of the antiglobalization movement in other countries, with the same founding debates – economic regional agreements (the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty was the first major public debate on globalization in France), the Uruguay Round and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI); and with the same frameworks.

The French antiglobalization groups took part in mass mobilizations, from Seattle to

Genoa or Florence, and in the Porto Alegre's process. Beyond José Bové and ATTAC, French groups are similar to the antiglobalization's mainstream, with NGOs, especially Third-World solidarity faith-based groups, and Social movements, that emerged out of December 1995 public employees strikes: trade unions and movement against social exclusion advocating what we call in French "Les sans" (social outcasts).

**Table1: The French Antiglobalization Movement**

	<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Social Movements</b>
<b>Main groups</b>	<p>French branch of international NGOs: <i>Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Act-Up</i></p> <p>Faith-based groups: <i>The CCFD (the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development), Terre des hommes, Secours catholique (Catholic Relief)</i></p> <p>Human Rights or anti-racist groups: <i>The League of Human Rights (LDH), MRAP</i></p>	<p>Groups advocating social outcasts (without rights, home or job): <i>AC !, DAL, Droits devant !</i></p> <p>Farmers associations: <i>Confédération paysanne (José Bové)</i></p> <p>Radical Trade Union: <i>Sud-PTT</i></p>
<b>Issues</b>	Third-World debt relief, aids-fighting, sustainable development, critics of the Bretton Woods institutions, ODA (Official development assistance) and climate change	WTO policy and GMOs
<b>Actions</b>	Public Campaigns	Sit-in strikes, demolition of a fast food or Genetically Modified Organisms' fields

## **2) French Exceptions: French vs. Global Antiglobalization**

However, there are several French exceptions relating to antiglobalization.

### **A) A French Perception of Globalization**

The first one relates to the specific perception and understanding of globalization.

According to U. S. antiglobalization activists, for example, globalization is mainly understood as free-trade and FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and the threat they point out to workers' jobs and earnings.

For French activists, globalization is mainly linked to financial flows (capital mobility and shareholder "dictatorship") and to their evils on cultural and national identity, sovereignty, democracy, inequalities, Welfare state, public services, environment, social rights, and human activities (what we call in France "la marchandisation du

*monde*": the commodification of the world<sup>1</sup>) in a global race to the bottom. In France, the globalization's threat is embodied by the United States through their Transnational corporations (TNCs), like McDonald's or Monsanto, their pension funds and now their foreign policy. In this framework, European Union (EU) is regarded as a Trojan Horse of this corporate-led globalization. Free financial flows, rather than free trade agreements, are the main targets of the French activists.

**Table2: Different Views of Globalization**

	<b>U. S. antiglobalization activists</b>	<b>French antiglobalization activists</b>
<b>Globalization</b>	Free-trade and FDI	Financial flows
<b>Consequences</b>	On workers' jobs and earnings	On cultural and national identity, sovereignty, democracy, inequalities, Welfare state, public services, environment, social rights, and human activities
<b>Threats</b>	Low cost countries and U. S. TNCs	The U. S. through their TNC or their pension funds
<b>Founding debates</b>	NAFTA, MAI	Maastricht, Uruguay Round, MAI
<b>Main targets</b>	Free trade agreements and TNC activities	Free financial flows
<b>Main activists groups</b>	Trade unions (AFL-CIO), NGOs (Global Trade Watch), anti-sweatshops groups	Pro-Tobin tax group (ATTAC), Farmer union (José Bové's <i>Confédération paysanne</i> )

### **B) ATTAC: An Unidentified Social Object in the Antiglobalization Galaxy**

ATTAC is another exception. Founded in June 1998 on the sole purpose to counter globalization, ATTAC quickly succeeded in gathering more than 30,000 members in France today. ATTAC is in itself a network that rallies most of the French antiglobalization groups. It is also a global network through the International ATTAC Movement which is gathering some 90,000 members in 50 countries, and a founding group of the Porto Alegre process and a member of the World Social Forum (WSF) secretariat. The ATTAC model is a French export best-seller.

ATTAC has the characteristic of being an USO, an unidentified social object in the Antiglobalization Galaxy. It is not really a typical NGO like Global Trade Watch for example. It is rather a mass movement and a patchwork: a think tank, through its Scientific Council; a lobby, through its Committees in public institutions, a quasi-political party which is not running for elections; and a trade union with an NGO face.

<sup>1</sup>. "A world where everything progressively becomes a commodity, where everything is sold and bought", *Tout sur ATTAC*, p. 22.

Beyond the Tobin tax, ATTAC has very political aims. It opposes politics to markets<sup>2</sup>. It calls for the recapture by citizens of the power that would be “diverted” by financial markets at the expense of democracy and state. Its members want to counterbalance a growing economic power by a new political power at the national and global scale with new tools like a global tax (the Tobin tax) and new governance institutions. If there is a uniqueness in the French antiglobalization movement, ATTAC would certainly be one.

### **C) A Specific Backlash**

If ATTAC is unique, the French antiglobalization movement does not look like the global one in many ways. There are almost no French think tanks producing a counter-expertise except for ATTAC’s Scientific Council, the Copernic Foundation or the Observatory of Globalization (which have very few means). In France, there is no equivalent to big think tanks like the U. S. Center for Economic and Policy Research (CPER), the Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy or the British New Economics Foundation. There are almost no French watchdog groups like Global Trade Watch, WTO Watch or Nike Watch, no group monitoring the French business behavior, with the exception of very small associations like the Transnational Observatory or a Vivendi watch web site. A group like ATTAC for example is a typically French organization: a group mainly set up by teachers and researchers, who have a remote and ideological perception of global affairs and economic activities.

There are almost no French radical youth groups, Race against the machine style groups, like the Italian Tutte Bianche, the British Reclaim the Streets or the North American Direct Action Network, and no French Black blocs. In France, radical youth groups are only small groups: the AARRG! (the *Apprentis agitateurs réseau résistance global*), anti far right or anarchists groups. We could find almost no French people in the violent Black bloc. In France, nobody knows what eco-warriors, eco-terrorists or animal rights activist (like Pim Fortuyn’s murderer) are. Finally, the French antiglobalization movement is mainly controlled by the Baby Boom Generation (José Bové’s one), shaped by the 60’s and 70’s struggles, rather than the X Generation (Naomi Klein’s one). For example it is much less anti-war or No Logo-like against Consumer Society than the U. S. one. Viviane Forrester (which wrote

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<sup>2</sup>. See Marcos Ancelovici’s “Politics against Global Markets” frame in “Organizing against Globalization. The case of ATTAC in France”, *Politics & Society*, September 2002.

*Economic Horror*<sup>3</sup>) is the French Naomi Klein...

## II) IS FRANCE REALLY OPPOSED TO THE “CORPORATE-LED GLOBALIZATION”?

The French protest movement is much more influential than the other ones. Except for the Brazilian case, its influence may be unique. The antiglobalization activists weigh on French reactions to globalization (French perception and discussions about globalization) but not on its responses to it (its influence on decision is rather weak)

### 1) A “Popular Anticapitalism”: The Influence of Antiglobalization on French Society

Figures of the size of Groups’ membership, results of professional elections, books and newspapers sales, gatherings and petitions collected suggest that the activists are influential on French society.

**Table 3: The Influence of the Antiglobalization Movement on French Society**

<b>Groups</b> Members (or volunteers)	Greenpeace (France): <b>50,000</b> ATTAC: <b>30,000</b> Sud-PTT (Trade union): <b>15,000</b> CCFD (NGO): <b>15,000</b>
<b>Professional Elections</b>	Farming: 28% of the polls for the <i>Confédération paysanne</i> in 2001 Chamber of agriculture’s elections. Public utilities: Sud Trade Union is the France Télécom and the French post office second trade union and the public railway company third one
<b>Publishing</b>	José Bové, Susan George, Viviane Forrester or Pierre Bourdieu’s books are best-sellers. Explosion of the sales of the monthly <i>Le Monde diplomatique</i> .
<b>Gatherings and Petitions</b>	The Bové trial in Millau, South of France, in June 2000 lured a huge gathering (as much demonstrators as in Seattle). Petitions collected: 110,000 signatures on Tobin tax in France and 520,000 ones on debt cancellation.

Opinion polls also suggest that fears about consequences of globalization are shared by a great number of French people and cut across traditional cleavages: a majority

<sup>3</sup>. Viviane Forrester, *Economic Horror*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999.

think that globalization deepens global and inner inequalities, and fosters a democratic deficit in giving too much power to financial markets. Opinion polls also suggest that the antiglobalization proposals on the Tobin tax or debt cancellation, or Bové's struggle against "Frankenfood" enjoy a strong public support. However French public opinion is not utterly opposed to globalization.

## **2) A Political Debate Under Influence**

### **A) *Mass Media***

This influence on society is greatly fed by the French mass media. The way the press covered the Porto Alegre gathering is very significant in this respect. There were 153 French journalists from 74 different media in 2003 to cover the World Social Forum (WSF) and only 97 U. S. journalists. It was the biggest delegation after the Brazilian one (equivalent to the Italian one). In January 2003, you could find more than 110 articles in the French daily national press related to this summit, roughly 20 in the British one and almost none in the U. S. one. *Le Monde* alone published more than 30 articles on Porto Alegre. A French regional daily news (*Ouest France*), which had a special correspondent in the city, published roughly 20 papers on the WSF. Antiglobalization is at the front page of the French press. In France, ordinary folks perceive antiglobalization as an important trend in the news and antiglobalization groups as key actors in the ideological landscape. Maybe with Brazil and Italy, France is certainly the country where the antiglobalization voice is the most audible.

### **B) *French Politics***

Of course, French politicians cannot ignore the movement, especially on the left wing of the political spectrum. Each French politician must take into account the antiglobalization activists' stance. France for example is the only country which has sent ministers to each Porto Alegre's summit. This year three French ministers from the current right-wing government went to the WSF. We can find ATTAC Committees in Parliament: between 1997 and 2002, more than 20% of the overall French deputies belonged to it. The question is not whether it's demagoguery or not. What matters here is that in France opponents of globalization enjoy so much support that they are courted by French politicians.



### **C) Left-wing Parties**

Left-wing parties in France are even closer to antiglobalization views. Trotskyists and the Greens that run for the presidency in 2002 took the antiglobalization's clothes. And they succeeded: with roughly 4,5 million votes and 16% of the polls for Olivier Besancenot, Noël Mamère, Arlette Laguiller and Daniel Gluckstein. By comparison Lionel Jospin obtained 4,6 million votes. The antiglobalization strength in France is certainly one of the reasons for Jospin's failure in the presidential election.

**Table 4: First<sup>t</sup> Round of the French Presidential Election, April 21, 2002**  
(Million votes)

<b>Incumbent Left-wing Prime Minister</b>	Lionel JOSPIN	4,6
<b>Radical Left and Greens</b>	Olivier BESANCENOT Daniel GLUCKTEIN Arlette LAGUILLER Noël MAMÈRE	4,5
<b>Communist Party</b>	+ Robert HUE	5,4
<b>Sovereignists</b>	Jean-Pierre CHEVÈNEMENT Jean SAINT-JOSSE	2,7
<b>Far Right</b>	Jean-Marie LE PEN Bruno MÉGRET	5,5

Since the left defeat, radical left-wing, Socialist Party left-wing and the antiglobalization movement seem to get closer. To some extent, the French center-left is an hostage to the antiglobalization movement exactly like the center-right was with the National Front.

### **D) Influence on the Terms of the Debate on Globalization**

The main success of the French backlash is to have defined the terms of the debate on globalization and especially of the political debate on this issue. All the more so since globalization is a central and a contentious issue in the French political debate. Activists have created an atmosphere of global distrust against the globalization process. In a way, today, we can say that they are the French "*pensée unique*" ("single thought") on globalization.

### **3) Don't Crack Under Pressure: Influence of Antiglobalization on Public Decision**

However their influence is limited.

### **A) MAI and The Tobin tax**

Our survey of the public decision-making in the “MAI affair” and the Tobin tax case<sup>4</sup> suggests that beyond speeches, the French responses to globalization are not “antiglobalizing”.

In the “MAI affair”, French activists contributed to the launching of a public debate on these subject and the arousing of an awareness of the possible risks related to this project. But the French government was above all influenced by other factors than the activists’ lobbying to reach its decision to withdraw from OECD negotiations: fears for the French sovereignty, the promotion of the French “cultural exception” (which is a concern since the Uruguay Round), doubts shared by French companies about the U.S. reservations in the Agreement, or the effective lobbying of the cultural sector.

In France, almost every politician must give his opinion about the idea of a taxation on financial transactions and lots of them are pro-Tobin tax: most of the left-wing and even some right-wing leaders, like the “sovereignist” Charles Pasqua or the centrist François Bayrou. In 2001, Lionel Jospin, then Prime minister, explained that he was in favor of that tax and in the end of that year a Tobin tax amendment was adopted by the French National Assembly. However, beyond Jospin government’s speeches on a taxation of financial transactions, the French left-wing government systematically rejected any amendment in French Parliament, even the 2001 one. Several official reports from the Ministry of Economy or the Economic Advisers Council suggest that the government should avoid adopting such a tax.

We can see the same dilemma between French pro-developing countries stance and big agricultural subsidies or its declining Official development assistance.

### **B) Meanstreet and Wallstreet**

French government, whether from left or from right-wing, and mainstream political parties are not opposed to globalization, far from it. But they experience a schizophrenic situation. They must take into account the concerns brought about by the globalization process and a globalization’s discontent voiced by the protest movement, and they must publicly condemn the unfettered capitalism or the Anglo-saxon shareholder capitalism. At the same time, France and especially French

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<sup>4</sup>. See Fougier, *op. cit.*

companies are one of the key actors of the current globalization process. French politicians must listen to the meanstreet call, rather close to the antiglobalization feeling, and the Wall Street one. In their book *The French Challenge* »<sup>5</sup>, Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier define this French approach to globalization as “Globalization by stealth”.

## **CONCLUSION: THERE IS NO FRENCH EXCEPTION**

In conclusion, in my view, the French antiglobalization movement is a symptom. A symptom of the difficulties that the French “social model” and “republican model” are experiencing in the context of globalization. It is not, therefore, the sign of a new French exceptionalism.

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<sup>5</sup>. Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier, *The French Challenge. Adapting to Globalization*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2002.