

## FRANCE, GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL PROTECTIONISM

By

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### Abstract

In spite of its mercantilist past, France has reluctantly converted to market liberalism and trade liberalization, both as the unintended by-product of European integration and as a conscious effort by policy-makers. As a result, we should expect France to break free from the traditionally protectionist demands of special interests and instead promote a more open international trade agenda. Nevertheless, the dominant political debate in France today centers precisely on the issue of how much control the nation should retain over its borders. This article analyzes why the theme of “globalization” has met with such a resonance in French public opinion and why France has taken the international lead in fighting the spread of globalization. I argue that the apparent paradox of the French discourse on trade highlights a general shift in the dominant paradigm of trade politics worldwide. The trade debate no longer rests on the traditional openness vs. protectionist dichotomy, but has been recast as Anglo-Saxon globalization vs. preservation of national and cultural identity. The novel features of this new protectionism are, first, that it transcends traditional political cleavages and, second, that it claims to be protecting the interests of the nation as a whole (if not humankind), instead of the special interest of small groups. I call this “global protectionism.” This article first traces the evolution of the anti-globalization discourse in French politics. It then focuses on international factors and on French domestic explanations to account for the extraordinary appeal of the anti-globalization agenda in France. Finally, this article analyzes the potential of the anti-globalization theme for reshaping the domestic political landscape, the course of European integration, and the world political economy.

## FRANCE, GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL PROTECTIONISM

### Introduction

In the last week of November 1999, a French sheep farmer named José Bové arrived in the United States with 400 hundred pounds of roquefort cheese in his suitcases. Clearly the man-of-the-year in France, Bové's claim to fame came from his destruction this summer of a McDonald's in the French countryside in order to protest US retaliatory trade sanctions against French products, the uncontrolled spread of market liberalism and globalization, and the imperialism of American capitalism. Invited to Seattle by the French government as part of France's delegation to the World Trade Organization (WTO) recent meeting, Bové was singled out by the American press as one of the most important personalities in attendance, along with Bill Clinton, Mike Moore and Charlene Barshevsky.<sup>1</sup> The central themes of Bové's extremely popular message have been echoed by Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Conservative president Jacques Chirac alike. Indeed, in a near unanimous show of support, France is taking the international lead in the outcry against the spread of globalization.

The extraordinarily popular appeal in France of the anti-globalization theme suggests an apparent paradox of French trade politics. On one hand, France is increasingly accepting the rule of market forces. In spite of its mercantilist past, France has converted to market liberalism and trade liberalization, both as the unintended by-product of European integration and as a conscious effort by policy-makers. The recent wave of mega-mergers, hostile takeovers, and stockholders' capitalism that have

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance *The Seattle Times*, 28 November 1999, special issue on the WTO meeting.

engulfed France in the past year has met with general acquiescence by the mainstream parties. As a result of this conversion, we should expect France to break free from the traditionally protectionist demands of special interest groups and instead promote a more open-oriented trade agenda internationally. Moreover, growth is picking up and unemployment is going down for the first time in a decade, thus further suggesting that protectionist demands should wane as their objective causes are receding. Finally, the French economy operates under so many international constraints that it seems that France no longer has the option of retreating from international competition behind protected borders.

On the other hand, the dominant political debate in today's France centers precisely around the issue of how much control the nation should retain over its borders – in particular over what enters the country. Since the summer of 1999, a very vocal attack against “mondialisation” (globalization) has occupied headlines and shaken up French politics. Intellectuals, organized groups, and now mainstream politicians have all joined the bandwagon denouncing the negative effects of globalization, homogenization, and Americanization. This raises two questions: Why has the theme of globalization met with such resonance in French public opinion? What will be the consequences of the popular French mobilization against globalization on French politics, European integration, and the world political economy?

The apparent paradox of the French discourse on trade highlights a more global shift in the dominant paradigm of trade politics worldwide. The trade debate no longer rests on the traditional openness vs. protectionist dichotomy, with special interest groups pressuring their government to shelter them from international competition. Instead, the trade debate is being recast as Anglo-Saxon globalization vs. preservation of national and cultural identity. The novel features of this new protectionism are, first, that it transcends traditional political cleavages and, second, that it claims to be protecting the interests of

the nation as a whole (if not humankind), instead of the special interest of small groups. I call this “global protectionism.”

The emergence of this new, “global” protectionism illustrates one unappreciated consequence of economic globalization: its potential for reshaping national politics. Globalization alters fundamental features of a country’s political identity, such as the relationship between the state and the individual, the exercise of democratic control, and the boundaries of sovereignty. As a result, globalization is also likely to affect the structural organization of interest representation, the relative weight between different political forces, and the individual definition of national identity.

France is a particularly interesting case for observing how globalization reshapes national cleavages and domestic politics. First, France has proclaimed itself the worldwide leader in the combat against globalization. Second, France possesses certain cultural and political characteristics that make it prone to identifying the negative side-effects of globalization and, as a result, to rejecting globalization sooner than most other countries. Finally, as a member of the European Union (EU), France has been exposed to partial globalization through European integration –thus making the consequences of globalization apparent and triggering a political debate earlier than in non-EU countries.

The first section of this article explores the evolution of the anti-globalization theme in France and examines the changing paradigm in trade politics from a simple economic discourse about jobs and prices, to a complex agenda about culture and identity. In the second section, I focus on international factors and on purely French explanations in order to account for the extraordinary appeal of the anti-globalization agenda in France. Finally, the third section of this article analyzes how the emergence of this new central theme in French society could potentially reshape the domestic political landscape, the course of European integration, and the world political economy. The

conclusion asks whether these changes in French trade politics are heralding the emergence of similar policy shifts in other countries.

## **Paradigm Shift in Trade Politics: From Special Protectionism to Global Protectionism**

The traditional cleavage in French trade politics has long been, like in most countries, between free trade and protectionism, between consumers and producers, between efficient industries and declining sectors. Politically, this means that freer trade (with the exception of the agricultural sector) was advocated by mainstream, centrist parties, while protectionism was defended by extremist parties on the far left and the far right. Recently, however, French trade politics seems to be moving away from the traditional free trade vs. protectionism cleavage, pitching dynamic and educated elites on one side against special interests and victims of trade openness on the other. Instead, the new cleavage centers around the concept of globalization –that is, the increased flow of goods, services, capital, persons and information across borders. This new cleavage reflects, in turn, a broader paradigm shift in trade politics from special protectionism in the name of a few, to “global protectionism” in the name of the nation as a whole, if not humankind. This “global protectionism” has proven so appealing to French public opinion since the summer of 1999 that the theme of anti-globalization has gained mainstream legitimacy and politicians have rallied its cause *en masse*.

### Globalization and the “new” French protectionism in the 1990s

Central to the political debate in today’s France is the issue of how much control the French nation should retain on what comes in and what goes out of the country. In a way, the discourse against globalization is not novel in France. This debate is the direct

heir of the breach opened in French politics in the 1980s by the far-right Front National party (FN) and the exacerbated discourse its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, about “borders” (Berger, 1995). The appeal of Le Pen’s message came primarily from his linkage of domestic economic insecurities to threats coming from outside France. His central claim was that high unemployment was the result of the “invasion” of France by immigrants, which in turn threatened national identity. From the immigrants to the free flow of goods, labor and capital as the main causes of France’s economic woes, there was only one step that FN supporters easily took when the debate turned to European integration and later to globalization. Indeed, Le Pen himself switched from immigration to trade globalization as the central theme of his electoral campaign for the June 1999 elections to the European Parliament.

The identification of external borders as the new cleavage in French politics was further accentuated by the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty on European Union. President Mitterrand had originally called the referendum for strictly Machiavellian domestic political reasons: since opinion polls had shown the French to be in overwhelming majority “in favor of” European integration, he expected to receive a plebiscitary show of support while weakening the Right, which was divided on the Europe issue. An unexpected consequence of the referendum campaign, however, was to trigger the first real public debate in France on the question of European integration (Meunier and Ross, 1993). The false support for European integration had come mainly out of ignorance of the real issues at stake (Percheron, 1991). The Maastricht campaign provided the first opportunity for a public debate about the potential consequences of increasing capital movements, shifting power from states to markets, and loss of democratic control. Even if the culprit being blamed then was not called globalization but Europeanization, the reasons for discontent were the same: the over-the-board liberalization of trade and capital was rendering the French economy more dependent on

the outside world, and therefore more vulnerable, while at the same time citizens saw their democratic prerogatives erode in favor of supranational and corporate actors. Consequently, as the campaign days went by, opposition to European integration mounted, led not only by the Front National and the Communists, but also by mainstream leaders such as Jean-Pierre Chevènement on the left and Philippe Seguin on the right. In September 1992, a 51% majority barely approved the referendum, thereby enabling the European Union to move forward with monetary union. The Maastricht referendum campaign served as a lesson for French politicians. Subsequent EU reforms, such as the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, were not submitted to popular ratification, since the openness of the French economy and the replacement of national sovereignty by Europeanization had come to be viewed as new evils threatening the welfare of French citizens and, more generally, the greatness of France.

The conclusion of the Uruguay Round in 1994 and the subsequent creation of the World Trade Organization provided another opportunity for opponents of globalization to articulate their views against the increasing power of corporations and the shift in power from elected national officials to non-elected trade bureaucrats and international officials. The 1992-93 crisis about agriculture, by which France endangered the whole multilateral round in the name of preserving its rural way-of-life, was followed by an equally firm French position on the so-called “cultural exception,” according to which cultural goods should be exempted from the rule of free trade. Although there was no real domestic political debate, these issues were featured prominently in the media for two years.

A less publicized, but equally defining moment in the French combat against globalization was the negotiation on the OECD Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) which collapsed in 1998. The primary objective of this agreement was to facilitate international investment by ensuring that host governments treat foreign and domestic firms similarly (Kobrin, 1998). The secret negotiations were taking place in Paris until

1997, when a draft agreement was leaked to a US-based consumer organization and denounced as a threat to democracy, sovereignty, human rights, economic development, and the environment. The main fear was that this agreement would limit the ability of national governments to regulate the protection of their environment, natural resources and health, as well as to end the protection of their citizens from foreign investors. After a coalition of extremely diverse non-governmental organizations in different OECD countries put pressure on their respective governments, the negotiations were halted. In the fall of 1998, the French government decided to walk away from the negotiations, and the agreement eventually failed.

Finally, the debate about globalization appeared in the French headlines in the spring of 1999 as a result of two rulings of the WTO against Europe. In the banana dispute, the WTO concluded that the existing EU preference for bananas from African and Caribbean states with whom the EU had preferential trading arrangements under the Lomé Convention was discriminatory. Therefore, the WTO allowed the US to impose retaliatory trade sanctions against European goods, such as Louis Vuitton handbags and Italian Pecorino cheese, so long as the EU banana regime was not in compliance with world trade rules. In the beef dispute, the WTO ruled that in the absence of scientific evidence attesting to the dangers of hormone-treated beef, the current EU ban was indeed a trade distorting, protectionist measure. Once again, the WTO allowed the US to impose trade retaliatory sanctions on European products, such as Dijon mustard and Roquefort cheese. Both rulings infuriated French public opinion and raised front-page concerns about the legitimacy and democratic accountability of globalization. Who were the WTO judges to rule that the American cattle lobby could force-feed potentially harmful hormone-treated beef down the throats of European children? The WTO rulings were presented in France as the clear evidence that globalization put business interests above all competing social concerns, such as consumer health and safety.



## Global protectionism and French civil society

Throughout the 1990s, the arguments in favor of protectionism shifted from the economic to the political and cultural realms. This new, “global protectionism” has much broader support than traditional protectionism, mainly because the opponents of globalization advocate protectionism not in order to defend narrowly-defined special interests, but on behalf of the nation as a whole. Global protectionism appeals to the collective sense of identity of French society –and is leading France through a strange exercise of collective introspection about what it means to be French. As such, this protectionism is likely to be more successful than if it were appealing only to the sense of solidarity of one group for another group.

In August 1999, a 46-year old sheep farmer named José Bové was arrested for trashing the site of a new McDonald’s outlet in the Pyrenean town of Millau. He acted, he argued, in reaction to the imposition of retaliatory sanctions against roquefort cheese by the United States as a result of the WTO ruling against the European ban on hormone-treated beef. His arrest, followed by his refusal to go free on bail made him an instant national hero. Clearly the man-of-the-year in France, Bové has been compared to Astérix, the popular French cartoon character who enabled his tiny Gallic village to resist to the big, bad Romans.<sup>2</sup> Instead of fighting off imperial invaders, however, the mustached Bové, who indeed bears a striking resemblance to Astérix, is helping France to resist the big, bad American multinational companies, as well as the evil forces of globalization.

Bové managed to capture the essence of French worries about globalization and struck a popular chord “with his denunciation of genetically modified food, the World

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<sup>2</sup> William Abitbol and Paul-Marie Couteaux, “Souverainisme, j’écris ton nom.” *Le Monde*, 30 September 1999.

Trade Organization and, especially, la mal-bouffe.”<sup>3</sup> By amalgamating culture and agriculture, trade and identity, anti-Americanism and the French spirit of revolt, he achieved a public relations victory. With his symbolic gesture, he put under the spotlight the totalitarianism of Anglo-Saxon capitalism,<sup>4</sup> as had started to do before him the influential puppet show “Les Guignols” with its denunciation of the “World Company” presided over by a Sylvester Stallone look-alike. Public opinion clearly followed. In an opinion poll published in *L’Expansion* in October, 60% of those surveyed perceived globalization as a direct cause of a worsening of social inequalities and as a threat to French identity, even though 50% also claimed that globalization was responsible for economic growth.<sup>5</sup>

The growing movement of opposition to globalization in France gained further momentum thanks to the outpour of support and mediatic visibility that crystallized around the Bové incident. This movement had already started to take shape in the intellectual sphere. Several organizations whose goal was to denounce the negative effects of globalization were created in the past few years, such as the Observatoire de la mondialisation (led by an American, Susan George), the Coordination pour le contrôle citoyen de l’OMC (CCCOMC), Droits Devant!, and Attac (brainchild of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, this association counted more than 12,000 members in September). These associations had direct contacts with their counterparts in other countries, as had been demonstrated by the anti-MAI activism.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Economist*, September 11, 1999, “Rural France, up in arms.”

<sup>4</sup> See Suzanne Daley, “French see a hero in war on McDomination.” *The New York Times*, 12 October 1999

<sup>5</sup> “Les Français et la mondialisation”, BVA poll. *L’Expansion*, 7 October 1999.

The novelty since the summer of 1999 is that this movement of resistance against globalization is now drawing from all parts of French civil society. Supporters go well beyond the intellectuals who founded the initial protest organizations. As in many other countries such as the United States, farmer organizations, labor groups and environmentalists have joined in the fight. Journalists (such as from *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Charlie Hebdo*, *Politis*, *Témoignage Chrétien*), academics (such as economists Bernard Maris and Nobel prize winner Maurice Allais)<sup>6</sup>, and film-makers (such as Bertrand Tavernier) have voiced their opposition. Even soccer players and coaches have demonstrated against the WTO and globalization to protest the advent of market capitalism in the management of sports teams.

In September 1999, more than a thousand small farmers, union leaders, students and green activists united in a public meeting against globalization. The demonstrators denounced the “democraticidal” nature of the WTO and demanded a moratorium on the Seattle trade negotiations. Commenting on the demonstration, the conservative *Figaro* observed that “faced with the tyranny of modernity, the revolt invites the powerful to obey morality and good sense.”<sup>7</sup> Two months later, the counter-globalization movement had managed to rally about 30,000 people to demonstrate against “liberal globalization” before the opening of the Seattle meeting.

#### Global protectionism in French politics

French politicians have been forced to follow this extremely popular rejection of “Anglo-Saxon globalization” and the appeal of the “global protectionism” message. For

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<sup>6</sup> As Maris notes, it is the first time since 1968 that academics leave their ivory tower and take an active part in the social debate. Quoted in Véronique Le Billon and Walter Bouvais, “Cette France qui dit non à la mondialisation”. *L'Expansion*, 7 October 1999

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Charles Bremmer, “French unite against US trade domination”, *The Times of London*, 24 September 1999.

the extremist parties, this is the logical continuation of their traditional anti-free trade combat. The Communist party, who claims to be the last adversary of capitalism in France, made the theme of globalization the centerpiece of its political agenda for the 1999-2000 years –and invited the green-libertarian Bové to be the hero of its annual Fête de l’Humanité.<sup>8</sup> The Front National continues to pursue the themes of borders and sovereignty that it had developed during the June 1999 European election campaign. Finally, as in the rest of the world, the political Greens have of course embraced this denunciation of globalization, portraying the latter as a destroyer of the environment.

Mainstream parties have not been able to withstand the wave of resistance to globalization and its extraordinary appeal in public opinion without jumping on the bandwagon. In the Socialist party, the first ones to publicly display their support for the anti-globalization movement were Julien Dray, Henri Emmanuelli, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis and Harlem Désir. Famous socialist personalities like Danielle Mitterrand and Jacques Attali are also at the forefront of this combat.<sup>9</sup> In October 1999, the government presented its objectives in trade policy to the National Assembly, after which the *députés* debated the issues of free trade and globalization.<sup>10</sup> Their conclusions were closely based on a report written by Béatrice Marre (PS, Oise), which recommended that the EU play a leading role in defending a civilization model that would respect economic, social and cultural differences. Since then, Prime Minister Jospin has tried hard to distinguish himself from his European social-democrat counterparts. This is why he made

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<sup>8</sup> Ariane Chemin, “Le Parti Communiste se pose en dernier adversaire du capitalisme”. *Le Monde*, 14 September 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Christiane Chombeau, “Le RPF espère attirer les militants de droite et d’extrême droite.” *Le Monde*, 21 September 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Beuve-Méry and Caroline Monnot, “L’OMC devient la cible du combat contre la mondialisation financière.” *Le Monde*, 26 October 1999.

clear that he was not pursuing a Blairite “third way” of social-liberalism, but a socialist approach to market economy distinct from capitalism.

The debate over globalization contributed to further splitting an already divided traditional Right. Many Center-Right leaders long wavered for ideological reasons on the question of what balance to achieve between economic liberalism and government intervention to protect from the negative effects of the market. Meanwhile, those who felt strongly about globalization prepared their defection to the new party created by Charles Pasqua in November 1999. The founding charter of the Rassemblement pour la France (RPF) pleads for the sovereignty of the French nation, the alliance of economic freedom and social cohesion in order to resist globalization, and the centrality of French values. In order to limit the damages done by this implosion of the Right, French president Jacques Chirac has tried to reappropriate for the traditional Right the globalization discontent by going on a very public attack against Anglo-Saxon economic imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

Given the near unanimous show of support for the anti-globalization message, French politicians, left and right, have legitimized “global protectionism.” As a result, France has taken the international lead in the fight against the spread of globalization.

## **Explaining the Appeal of the Anti-Globalization Message**

How can we explain the emergence of this new anti-globalization discourse that transcends traditional political cleavages? How can we explain the overwhelming resonance that it found in French society, even though France’s economy is objectively

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance “Can America trust the French?” *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 November 1999.

faring better than before thanks in great part to globalization? I offer explanations rooted in international, as well as domestic factors.

### International explanations

As the demonstrations against the opening conference of the Millennium Round in Seattle illustrated, the revolt against globalization is an international phenomenon. Some of the explanations for the appeal of the anti-globalization discourse in France are therefore of a structural and international nature.

The changing nature of trade: Opposition to free trade and globalization has developed because the issues now subsumed under the reach of “trade” are of a more contentious and domestically sensitive nature than before. When trade was only about tariffs and quotas, trade politics was easy to understand. Trade pitted importers vs. exporters and consumers vs. producers. The argument to restrict or expand trade was an economic argument about jobs and prices. Tariffs and quotas could be manipulated to protect special interests, and when governments decided to open up certain economic sectors to international competition, these special interests could be compensated. With each round of multilateral trade negotiations under GATT, traditional trade barriers were further reduced and new types of non-tariff barriers tackled. During the Uruguay Round, the “new issues” of services and intellectual property were added to the traditional trade agenda. Since then, trade negotiations have started to address even “newer” issues, such as investment and telecommunications. Today, trade extends to all kinds of domestic regulatory policies, including food safety, environmental regulations and labor laws. This is what gave rise to most of the popular opposition to free trade and the WTO regime. Letting bureaucrats negotiating in secret and panels made of unelected judges decide the validity of democratically agreed upon national regulations affecting their daily lives is unacceptable to many concerned citizens.

The “end of ideology”: One of the interpretations of the end of the Cold War is that it consecrated the victory of Capitalism over Communism. In the past decade, there has been a near universal acceptance of a society model based on market principles and private capital. In most countries, the ideological differences between politicians to the left and to the right of the center narrowed down considerably, as the politicians converged in their belief in the inherent superiority of the free market economy. However, this “single thinking”, or “pensée unique” as the French call it, bears in itself the seeds of a counter-reaction. As Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique* and one of the international intellectual leaders of the counter-globalization movement, argues: “The arrogance of the pensée unique has reached such an extreme that one can, without exaggerating, call it modern dogmatism.[...] This doctrine is the only ideology authorized by the invisible and omnipresent opinion police.” (Ramonet, 1999). Many intellectuals worldwide found in the WTO the symbol of the new totalitarianism of international capitalism and are now busy developing an alternative to unchecked capitalist globalization. Instead of the “end of ideology,” we are on the contrary entering a period of fertile ideological renewal with the debate on globalization.

The globalization of opposition: Finally, and ironically, one of the factors that has contributed the most to the force of the anti-globalization movement is globalization itself. As many analysts have noted, the technological revolution, and above all the Internet, have enabled information to circulate and create an “electronic global village” (Kobrin, 1998). By being better informed, opponents of globalization can thus organize more effectively and mobilize on an international scale, as was demonstrated by the protests in Seattle, which resulted from over a year of planning by NGOs over the world connected by e-mail.

### French domestic explanations

These international factors all contribute to explaining why trade politics is moving from the old paradigm of free trade vs. protectionism to the new paradigm of globalization vs. resistance to globalization. However, it is noteworthy that the anti-globalization movement is stronger in France than in all the other European countries and that France has taken the international lead in promoting an alternative to “Anglo-Saxon globalization.” What are the institutional, political and ideological factors that explain why France became so receptive to the anti-globalization discourse, paradoxically at a time of economic renewal?

France and its “natural” world role: A constant feature of French foreign policy has been to assert its special role in international politics. As France was relegated from its status as a world power to a status of second-rate power, successive French leaders have looked for ways in which to influence world politics –often in reaction to the United States. Under De Gaulle’s leadership, France established itself as a third way in international relations, bridging the two superpower camps. Under Mitterrand, France turned towards European integration and the economic might of the EU as a way of ensuring this world role. Today, now that the “old order is gone, it is obvious France is looking for a new, singular, and equally comfortable niche in today’s system of globalization.” (Friedman, 1999b). Indeed, the globalization debate gave France an opportunity to find a new world role as leader of the movement looking to develop an alternative to “Anglo-Saxon globalization.” In doing so, France also proclaimed itself the spokesperson for the developing world. French intellectuals readily point to the increasing inequalities between the richest and the poorest countries as a by-product of free trade and



globalization.<sup>12</sup> French opinion makers and politicians incessantly repeat that the combat of globalization in the name of the most disadvantaged on the planet is a sacred duty of France.

French anti-Americanism: One well-known peculiarity of the French cultural identity is its latent anti-Americanism. Going back to the collective humiliation of defeat in the two world wars before American help and the collapse of its colonial empire, as well as to De Gaulle's personal history, anti-Americanism has been an underlying fixture of French identity. This feeling was rekindled in 1999 by the actions of the US against bananas and beef through the WTO. Through Bové's deliberate attack against McDonald's as well as the denunciation of "Anglo-Saxon imperialism" by leading French politicians, the US has become the scapegoat for social groups hurt by globalization.<sup>13</sup> Particularly noteworthy is that French anti-Americanism seems to cut across sociological cleavages.<sup>14</sup> This French phenomenon, not shared by most of the other EU member states, has undoubtedly contributed greatly to the overwhelming support for the counter-globalization movement in French public opinion.

France and sovereignty: A defining feature of the French political identity is the central concept of sovereignty, which was invented in France two centuries ago. One of the most worrisome aspects of globalization is indeed the erosion of democratic accountability and popular sovereignty. Intellectuals have argued that no French government, including one

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<sup>12</sup> "Globalization worsens differences and divides and polarizes societies. In 1960, before globalization, the most fortunate 20% of the planet's population were 30 times richer than the poorest 20%. In 1997, at the height of globalization, the most fortunate were 74 times richer than then world's poorest. And this gap grows each day.[...] During the last 15 years of globalization, per capita income has decreased in more than 80 countries" (Ramonet, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> See Ezra Suleiman, "Les nouveaux habits de l'Anti-américanisme", *Le Monde*, 29 September 1999

<sup>14</sup> Véronique Le Billon and Walter Bouvais, "Cette France qui dit non à la mondialisation". *L'Expansion*, 7 October 1999.

from the Right, would ever dare to propose policies such as those on labor or health policy, which could result from WTO negotiations. Globalization produces a real democratic deficit, a “rape of popular will”, which is in a large majority hostile to financial globalization and ultraliberalism, as is shown by opinion polls.<sup>15</sup> The 1992 debate on the Maastricht referendum already demonstrated the appeal of the sovereignty theme in French public opinion. The Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the WTO meeting in Seattle have proven to be further opportunities for the country that went through the 1789 revolution to reassert basic democratic principles –and, in so doing, once again teaching the world a lesson.

France and the central role of the state: A related aspect of French political culture is the role played by the central state. Since the revolution, the French economy and society have been governed by an omniscient and omnipotent central state. The French people became used to relying on the state for entrepreneurship, political leadership, and economic support. Globalization threatens this institutional trait of French politics because it weakens the powers of the state by giving more responsibilities to private actors. Globalization is indeed the consecration of Anglo-Saxon individualism. In reacting against globalization, the French are reacting to the collapse of their political tradition in favor of a foreign system of political values.

Amalgamation between culture, trade and identity: Globalization has also been vilified in France because it threatens the very foundation of French greatness: its unique culture. A clash between French and American cultures was bound to happen since both claim a universalist vocation. The question of trade and culture was at the top of the foreign trade agenda towards the end of the Uruguay Round, when the US and the EU debated the issue of “cultural exception.” At the time, however, the debate was limited to cultural

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard Cassen, “OMC, l’attentat contre la démocratie”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 8 October 1999.

goods per se, such as movies, music, and television programming. What has changed in recent years is the realization that the threat to French culture comes not only from trade in cultural goods, but more broadly from trade in general. The WTO has been portrayed in France as the Trojan horse of the uniformization of the world around the American way-of-life –that is, a “low” culture made up of fast food, bad clothing and dumb sitcoms.<sup>16</sup> By opposition, the French cultural model is portrayed as a “high” culture, made of universal philosophers, fine paintings, and intellectual movies. Indeed, one of Bové’s public relations victories was to put side-to-side agriculture and culture, and back-to-back roquefort and McDonald’s. In an editorial entitled “Vive le Roquefort libre!”, *Le Monde* even seriously claimed that “resistance to the hegemonic pretenses of hamburgers is, above all, a cultural imperative.”<sup>17</sup>

Focusing the cultural arguments on food has proven a particularly fruitful strategy for the adversaries of globalization. Of all the components of French cultural identity, food may be the most universally recognized internationally and the greatest source of pride domestically.<sup>18</sup> By painting globalization as a direct attack on French food, its opponents received national approbation for a collective struggle against “la malbouffe.”<sup>19</sup> Bové and his followers put in the same bag US trade and food imperialism, so-called “Frankenstein foods” (a.k.a. genetically modified organisms), and the American

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<sup>16</sup> Véronique Le Billon and Walter Bouvais, “Cette France qui dit non à la mondialisation”. *L’Expansion*, 7 October 1999.

<sup>17</sup> “Vive le Roquefort libre!”, Alain Rollat, *Le Monde*, 9 September 1999.

<sup>18</sup> As the respectable *Le Monde* recently noted, “McDonald’s red and yellow ensign is the new version of America’s star-spangled banner, whose commercial hegemony threatens agriculture and whose cultural hegemony insidiously ruins alimentary behavior --sacred reflects of French identity.” *Le Monde*, “McDonald’s critiqué mais toujours fréquenté”, 24 Septembre 1999, Jean-Michel Normand.

<sup>19</sup> An almost untranslatable expression literally meaning: bad eating.

nutritional model “which produces a nation where 30 percent of people are obese.”<sup>20</sup> Since French politicians have nothing to lose in fighting on behalf of French culinary traditions and since nothing that they can say on the issue seems to have the potential for backfiring, they have entered a free-for-all battle of wits in which they try to outdo each other with catchphrases and solemn declarations on hamburgers. The winner in this category may be the socialist minister of agriculture, Jean Glavany, who seriously said to the press in June that “the US has the worst food in the world” and declared in August that he had never eaten at McDonald’s and that he disliked hamburgers.<sup>21</sup>

Globalization also threatens French culture because it weakens even further the French language, itself a prominent component of French identity. In recent decades, France has tried to stop the decline of the usage of French in the world by promoting an aggressive policy known as “francophonie.” Externally, it meant helping the teaching of the French language, developing cultural exchange, and facilitating cultural creation in French. It also meant defending French in the traditional bastion where it was usually spoken: international diplomacy. Internally, the French policy on language translated into a ban on the use of some foreign words and a creative process to develop an alternative vocabulary. It also meant a downplaying of local dialects and regional languages. With globalization, however, France is losing this battle. English is the language of business, of air traffic control and of the Internet, spoken by 1.6 billion people on the planet (Fishman, 1998-99). Successive French governments have adopted a defensive attitude against attacks on the preeminence of the French language, since language has long been seen as one of the central unifying, republican forces in France.

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<sup>20</sup> Reported by John Lichfield, “Burger crusader becomes a hero,” *The Independent*, 9 September 1999.

<sup>21</sup> see personal correspondence of the author with Jean Glavany, Summer 1999.

The cohabitation: Globalization has also become an important theme in French politics because of domestic political causes. On one hand, the “end of ideology” argument is mirrored at the domestic level by an uneventful rule of cohabitation. Even though the French government has been divided between a right-wing president and a left-wing cabinet, most economic issues have been resolved in a courteous, consensual way. As a result, the opposition had to crystallize around a new theme, since the “single thinking” in the management of economic policy seemed to have been universally accepted. In part because of the legacy of the Front National, this theme became one of the relation between France and its borders. On the other hand, cohabitation also contributed to toughening up the discourse of mainstream politicians. Jospin and Chirac, who will likely run against each other in the 2002 presidential election, compete with tough posturing to garner the support of the extremely popular anti-globalization movement. For Jospin, it takes the shape of a leftwing discourse on the necessity of regulating world trade and the excesses of the free market. For Chirac, it translates into an independentist rhetoric about France’s role in the world and into a head-to-head confrontation with the United States. This competition only reinforces the dominant position of France in the international fight against the spread of globalization and in the development of a counter-model.

Time will tell which of these factors played the most important role in transforming France into the world champion of counter-globalization. The reshaping of the French political landscape, due to the external pressures of globalization, will undoubtedly have larger consequences for the political economy regime of the next century.

## **Consequences of the Anti-Globalization Discourse**

The current preeminence of the globalization theme in French society can potentially affect not only French domestic politics, but also the course of European integration and the nature of the world political economy.

### Consequences on French domestic politics

*Consequences on the French political landscape:* The most direct consequence of globalization on French domestic politics has been to accelerate the implosion and recomposition of the Right. For over a decade, there were three parties in the French Right: the economically liberal UDF, the conservative Gaullist RPR, and the xenophobic National Front. For the past few years, however, politicians have defected from the big parties and founded a multitude of small parties, ad-hoc electoral lists, and opportunistic alliances. The disarray of the Right has come in great part from the adoption of many of its defining policies, such as economic liberalism, by the Left. The challenge of globalization is transforming this disarray into an opportunity for reforming the parties around a clear cleavage: those who accept globalization and those who do not. The Centrists and the UDF have committed to embracing European integration and global economic liberalization. The newly founded Rassemblement pour la France (RPF), by contrast, has put the new concept of “souverainisme” at its core. What is left for the RPR and the National Front? I would predict that the Gaullist RPR is eventually doomed to a slow death if it does not seize on new themes in order to distinguish itself from the other competing parties on the Right. The rhetoric of Gaullist Philippe Seguin distinguishing between the good “mondialisation” and the bad “globalization” is not enough.<sup>22</sup> As for

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<sup>22</sup> Private discussion with author, December 1999.

the National Front, its representativity might continue to dwindle to the benefit of the RPF until only the hard core of xenophobic supporters is left.

Globalization also has the potential of contributing to an ideological renewal and reshaping of the Left. The Socialist Party has adopted both European integration and globalization, albeit in a harnessed, controlled incarnation. Other components of the Left have not been so eager to embrace these themes. The “Mouvement des Citoyens” led by Jean-Pierre Chevènement, has developed the “souverainist” message on the Left, with a mix of fear of loss of national sovereignty, centrality of the state, and democratic deficit. The Communist Party is undergoing an ideological rejuvenation thanks to the opportunity offered by globalization to denounce the ill-effects of market capitalism and American totalitarianism. We might expect the Communists to gain some new supporters, or at least stop the hemorrhage of its current supporters, as a result of the prominence of the anti-globalization debate. The biggest potential impact of globalization on the Left may be on the emergence and strengthening of alternative parties, such as the Greens, which may seem logical outlets for voters concerned about the effects of globalization and wishing to develop an alternative model.

*The end of agricultural corporatism:* The advent of globalization and its central role in current French political debate may also herald, as a surprising consequence, the end of agricultural corporatism in France. Since the end of the Second World War, French farmers had been united under the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d’Exploitants Agricoles (FNSEA), whose policy has long been to develop agricultural productivism and export capacity through the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in the name of food self-sufficiency in Europe. This powerful peak organization had direct ties to the various governments and the quasi monopoly of representation of agricultural interests. The French got used to the FNSEA protectionist ways: whenever farmers disagreed with government policy, they just took their violent protests to the

streets, until the government would back down or compensate them. Public opinion reluctantly went along, agreeing to pay astronomical subsidies to agriculture in exchange for the preservation of a certain rural way-of-life that the FNSEA pretended to be defending.<sup>23</sup> Overall, the FNSEA has been most skillful in obtaining protection from external competition and in using this protection to become the world's second largest agricultural exporter, after only the United States.

The debate about globalization may be transforming this privileged political position of the FNSEA. The French farmers who captured the headlines in 1999 were not, for once, supporters of the FNSEA, but instead members of the Confédération Paysanne (CP), a small organization founded in 1987 with roots in the leftist May 68 movement. The CP was created to represent small farmers and challenge the productivist, industrialist agricultural policy supported by the FNSEA and resulting from the CAP subventions. Instead, José Bové and François Dufour, the current leaders of the Confédération, demand an agriculture that preserves the rural landscape and way of life – a recognition of the so-called “multifunctionality” of agriculture. The violence that the CP supporters engaged in during the summer of 1999 was of a very different nature from the usual corporatist violence of the big farmers: Bové and his followers revolted against the quality of food products, both from a cultural and from a public health perspective. Food quality is of concern to the whole society, not only to the interests of a small group of farmers. In this way, the Confédération Paysanne is a clear illustration of the new protectionism that I highlighted in this article: “global protectionism.” This is certainly why so many people in France --from the Greens and the Left, to the Right souverainistes-- have been supporting these farmers. As *Le Monde* reported, “This is the

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<sup>23</sup> Many scholars and analysts have attempted to explain the apparent paradox of agricultural power in France: Keeler gives a good summary of the explanations, such as asymmetry of interests, collective action problems, real size of the agricultural lobby, historical causes, organizational clout, and political and electoral role (Keeler, 1996).



first time since the famous [1968] Larzac fight that a farm movement becomes the spokesperson of the interests of a collectivity bigger than itself.”<sup>24</sup> The appeal of the CP may continue to grow, as the public discovers the extent of the “industrialization” of the French agriculture through a growing series of food scares (such as the mad cow disease, the hormone-treated beef, dioxin scare, nitrates, etc.) and tires of the “blackmail” long imposed by the FNSEA on French society.<sup>25</sup> If the CP succeeds in establishing a durable alliance with consumers and environmentalists, it may deal a fatal blow to the monopolistic position of the FNSEA.

### Consequences on European integration

*Consequences on support for European integration:* France seems to be entertaining a dialectical relationship with Europeanization and globalization. On one hand, Europeanization, which came first, is just one variant of globalization. Most of the effects traditionally associated with globalization have been experienced by France, to a lesser degree, in the wake of the implementation of the Single market program since the late 1980s: increase in economic dependence, increase in foreign investment, democratic deficit, erosion of national sovereignty, etc. Therefore, the issues debated today by the adversaries of globalization simply echo the issues raised by French politicians during the debate on Maastricht in 1992. Indeed, I argue that the fact that France took a “headstart” in discussing these themes explains in part why this country has taken the lead internationally in the combat against globalization. Many French opponents of globalization have the advantage of a known terrain for having reflected on the same

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<sup>24</sup> Jean-Paul Besset, “Une fièvre paysanne qui dépasse le corporatisme”, *Le Monde*, 1 September 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Writes Messerlin: “The Uruguay Round made an internal breakthrough by inducing the French to look at their country’s blackmail in the negotiations for what it was: a cost mercilessly imposed by a very small French farm lobby on all the other French interests, including other farm interests (Messerlin 1996, p. 297).

issues earlier. Their opposition to globalization follows in direct continuity of their opposition to European integration.

On the other hand, the debate on globalization has also partly displaced the debate on Europe. Indeed, some of the opponents of European integration in the early 1990s are now using the EU as a buffer, an alternative, and a tool to control globalization. European integration offers France a large market, a shared system of values embodied in the EU institutions, and the potential for a powerful voice in international relations –all of which can be used to counter American globalization. Recent polls in France indicate a clear increase in support for European integration.<sup>26</sup> About two-thirds of French people now favor further European integration. The largest increases come from traditionally reluctant socio-economic groups, such as women, and private sector employees. Indeed, 73 percent of those polled said that Europeanization is indeed a way of fighting against the bad effects of mondialisation. Many French politicians have followed this trend in public opinion. Even some of the most vocal opponents of Europe during the Maastricht debate are now praising the virtues of the EU as France's only realistic way to propose an alternative to the current globalization. With the exception of the extremist parties, and to some extent the *souverainistes*, Europe has now become a consensual issue in French politics and public opinion.

*Consequences on European institutions:* Increased support for European integration does not mean, however, increased support for supranationalism. On the contrary, one could expect the discourse on democratic deficit and loss of sovereignty to increase pressures for an intergovernmental Europe. This comes at a crucial time for European institutions. The EU is now embarking on a new Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) designed to reform its institutions in view of the near enlargement to

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<sup>26</sup> See IPSOS opinion poll, 10 March 1999.

countries from central and eastern Europe. The central debate revolves around the issue of how much sovereignty should be transferred to the supranational level, and how much decision-making power should remain the prerogative of the member states. Because of the centrality of the concerns brought about by the globalization debate, France may weigh heavily towards the intergovernmental design, even if it means a trade-off in terms of practicality. The globalization debate may also make France more inclined to expand the scope of the EU policies at the same time. In order to develop an alternative model to American globalization, France needs the support of a strong Europe –which may imply a well-developed foreign and security policy for instance.

#### Consequences on the world political economy

The preeminence of the globalization debate in France these days may affect the world political economy through two mechanisms: 1) the consequences on European trade policy, in which France is coincidentally taking a new role; and 2) the risk of contagion of the debate to other countries.

*Consequences on European trade policy:* The emergence of a central debate on globalization in French politics and the appeal of “global protectionism” in French society will certainly impact the content of EU trade policy –and as a result the substance of any trade agreement negotiated between the EU and the US. The EU has adopted some of the French discourse against globalization, as was made clear by its position in the Seattle meeting supposed to inaugurate a new round of multilateral trade talks. Some of the pet themes of Europe were the “multifunctionality” of agriculture, the inclusion of international regulations on competition, and the guaranteeing of food safety. Indeed, even though the EU has emerged in recent years as a champion of open markets and multilateral trade rules, the 15-member entity is now trying to actively develop a “harnessed” and “managed” alternative to globalization.

The influence of France on the definition of EU trade policy may increase since France has recently taken on a new prominent role in its management. First, it is a Frenchman, Pascal Lamy, who is now at the helm of EU trade policy as the new trade commissioner since September 1999. The era of Sir Leon Brittan, the “ultraliberal Thatcherian dinosaur” in the words of the French press, is over.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not this new French role will lead to a more protectionist or liberal EU trade policy is unknown. On one hand, Lamy is a French socialist known for his role in the Delors Commission. His nomination has aroused fears and suspicions that the Commission will become a champion of the protectionist policies favored by France, especially in agriculture. So far, this prediction has not realized, as Lamy has pursued the same trade agenda as his predecessor. On the other hand, some analysts see in Lamy’s appointment evidence of political inspiration. It might well be that only a French person can sell trade liberalization to the French! Second, France is scheduled to take over the rotating presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2000. As president, it will have some increased powers of initiative and leadership. If the French presidency coincides with a relaunching of bilateral and/or multilateral trade talks, one may expect Europe to adopt a firmer stance on rejecting the unilateral and arrogant ways of US trade policy.

*Internationalization of opposition to globalization:* Finally, it is worth asking whether the current French debate on globalization may have a “contagion effect” on the domestic politics of other countries. The coalition of opponents to globalization was successful in both the MAI and the Seattle cases precisely because it was a coalition –of diverse interests, of diverse political affiliations, of diverse countries. The French opponents of globalization are finding solace and support in the birth of an anti-globalization movement worldwide. The appeal of “global protectionism” goes beyond

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<sup>27</sup> Christian de Brie, “L’AMI nouveau va arriver”, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1999.

the borders of nations and states. Bové claims to have more in common with small, organic farmers in Washington State than with the big, industrial-like agricultural producers of the French Beauce region (which earned him criticism of being a US “double-agent” from the FNSEA). Indeed, the Confédération Paysanne has been actively looking for support outside of France, first with the Confédération Paysanne Européenne and then the creation of an international farm movement called via Campesina (which includes 69 associations from 37 countries on four continents). Global protectionism does not only transcend national frontiers, it also transcends socio-economic borders. Some contagion is occurring because of a strange alliance between very diverse groups, such as environmentalists, supporters of human rights, consumer organizations and trade unions. French intellectuals and politicians feel that they can play a role in enabling this contagion. Only when the anti-globalization movement will have grown strong enough can France hope for some international receptiveness to its alternative model.

## **Conclusion**

Many countries have qualms about globalization. All across the world, from Latin America to Scandinavia, voices are raised against widening inequalities, increasing democratic deficit, and cultural homogeneization as a result of globalization. The Seattle protests revealed that even in the United States, a variety of social groups had reservations about the negative impact of opening up borders to trade and investment. Some of the demonstrators, such as the Teamsters and other labor unions, were in Seattle to defend a traditional protectionist agenda. Most of the activists, however, were demonstrating in the name of global protectionism. They spoke on behalf of the monarch butterflies and the sea turtles, on behalf of child labor regulations and human rights, on behalf of democratic control and national sovereignty. Global protectionism has the

potential for reshaping domestic politics because it unites groups with diverse political outlooks in their defense of the common good –be it the nation, the environment, or a set of moral values.

France is unique in the fight against globalization because its political and cultural identity combine all the elements that are threatened by globalization: a universalist culture; a language with international aspirations; a “superior” food; an older practice of democracy; a sensitive view of national sovereignty; a central role of the state; a need for a world role; a sense of duty towards the more disadvantaged nations; and, most of all, a deep-rooted anti-Americanism. This is what explains why France has taken the international lead against the spread of Anglo-Saxon globalization. When asked why France is pretty isolated in the cultural aspects of the fight against globalization, especially within Europe, French politicians do not hesitate to answer that France is the only one to defend its culture, because France is the only one to have something to defend.<sup>28</sup>

In the absence of strong support from other countries to help in the fight against globalization, what can France do to change the course of history? The central problem of France’s position to date has been an extremely defensive attitude towards globalization. Political leaders, fueled by strong public opinion resentment, have portrayed a France (and more generally a Europe) under attack by the “steamroller” of American trade imperialism. The anti-globalization discourse is a call-to-arms to resist. This is not a very constructive way of stopping the spread of globalization. Instead, France should be promoting its culture in a positive manner, by showing its universalist appeal rather than asserting it. France should also be looking more actively for international support in developing an alternative to globalization. Some groups, such as

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<sup>28</sup> Personal interviews.

the Confédération Paysanne and environmental activists, have already embarked on a strategy of making cross-country alliances. If politicians want to bolster their claims to a different, more democratic, more just world economy, they should work with their European partners on providing a sensible alternative. The main reason why they are not really doing this is the paradox that I stated at the beginning of this article: France is increasingly resisting globalization, while at the same globalization can be identified as the main driving force behind the recent success and modernization of the French economy. As long as politicians have not found a way to resolve this fundamental tension, French opposition to globalization will remain purely rhetoric –with clear domestic consequences, but little chances of affecting the rest of the world.

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