

# The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events  
impacting the world's financial markets*

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## THEY SAID IT

Prince Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, in a letter to one of his mistresses, Madame de Flahaut, dated July 15, 1790, the day following the "Fete de la Federation," celebrating the first anniversary of Bastille day.

*And I will say this; although I am a philosopher, I deplore the peoples' increasing lack of faith. I share Voltaire's opinion: whether we ourselves believe in God or not, it would be dangerous for any society if the masses thought that no punishment was forthcoming in this world or the next and that they were free to steal, poison, and murder. We live in an age when doctrines contrary to morality have to be feared more than ever, because our laws have no force or support and because the majority of the people consider themselves superior to them. And what is most deplorable is the interest the Assembly takes in stirring up this spirit of political and moral anarchy among the populace.*

SOME THOUGHTS ON Le PEN. Mon Dieu! Was that some election in France, or what? What a *shocker!* Why, I had no idea the French electorate would do something like that. I mean, can you imagine? The communists got 4% of the vote, two Trotskyites got 8% between them, a socialist got 16%, and a handful of other "pinks" received enough combined votes to give the solid left at least a one-third plurality of the French electorate. This means that one out of three French voters chose to back a platform of economic insanity.

I am having a little fun here, of course. Actually, I am reacting to an editorial in the *Washington Post* on the French election entitled "France's Shock," which breathlessly declared that Jean-Marie Le Pen's second place finish in the race, with 17% of the vote, along with a 2%-plus share by "a former deputy," meant that "one out of every five French voters chose to back a platform of bigotry and xenophobia."

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*Sacrebleu!* Bigotry and xenophobia in France? Fascists in France? Who knew?

I shouldn't pick on the *Post*, I suppose. Papers all over the world sang the same song, declaring that this "strong" showing for Le Pen was "shocking." One wonders where all these "shocked" people have been for the past several hundred years. Indeed, one wonders if any of them have ever actually been to France. Heard the French talk about their neighbors, the Germans. Or their "guests," the Algerians. Or Jews, for that matter. If the French didn't actually invent bigotry and xenophobia, for goodness sake, they certainly made the sauce for it.

The French are, after all, Europeans, and like all good Europeans they have so many prejudices that their prejudices have prejudices. I mean these people have been sacrificing themselves and their neighbors on the altar of bigotry and xenophobia with monotonous regularity ever since Charlemagne's grandkids, Lothair, Ludwig the German, and Charles the Bald (my personal favorite), divided Europe into three parts via the Treaty of Verdun in 843. These people once fought something called the "100 years war," (which actually lasted 116 years) and another called the "30 years war."

I can understand people at the *Post* being ignorant of history, given the sad state of the American educational system during the past several decades. But isn't anyone at the newspaper old enough to remember the old 1959 *Hungry I* album by the Kingston Trio that contained the song "Merry Minuet?"

....The French hate the Germans,  
The Germans hate the Poles,  
Italians hate Yugoslavs,  
South Africans hate the Dutch,  
And I don't like anybody very much . . .

And as for bigotry, anti-Semitism has been an integral part of French society since the revolution in 1789, and a significant factor in French politics since the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, just about one hundred years ago, France almost came apart over the Dreyfus affair. The unfortunate Captain Dreyfus finally had to be pardoned by President Loubet because the French judicial system couldn't be trusted to exonerate a Jew in a fair trial, even though evidence abounded that he had been railroaded.

In one of those ironic twists of history, Hannah Arendt's classic tome, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, credits the Dreyfus Affair with giving birth to the same Zionist movement that is now giving the French such heartburn, as evidenced by the recent statement by the French ambassador to Britain that much of the world's troubles can be blamed on "that shitty little country Israel."

Listen! The key to understanding the Le Pen vote is to understand that France is in the vanguard of something quite new in the world, an historic anomaly. It has finally achieved what its great atheistic heroes, Voltaire and Rousseau, had sought and what Talleyrand had the good sense to fear, even though he himself was a notorious libertine. France is a post Christian state. It is a state in which the people share no common transcendental belief system.

There are, of course, still a large number of secular characteristics that define “the French,” that bind them into a “people,” a “nation.” Among these are a common history, language, and culture. The problem is that the governmental elite that runs France is desperately trying to replace these with a newly constructed reverence for “things European.”

This lack of a universally respected moral code, coupled with a government-inspired erosion in French patriotism, has aggravated France’s endemic problem of widespread government corruption. This corruption dates back several hundred years ago to the days of mercantilism, which France practiced with great enthusiasm and which created a permanent, huge bureaucracy and an equally permanent corrupting link between business and politics. All of this has, in turn, been aggravated by the emergence within the nation’s socialist system of an elite political ruling class, a development that was recognized and decried by Georges Sorel early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In short, France is one of a number of the world’s new sensate societies, with few if any conservative defenses against the corrupting influence of modernity. Ironically, one of the distinguishing features of such nations is the fact that their populations are so steeped in spiritual ennui and materialism that they are not reproducing themselves as rapidly as they are dying.

Now all of this could go on for a very long time without causing too much trouble, except that France’s declining population, combined with its sordid history of colonialism, has resulted in an influx of some five million-plus Muslims with more on the way.

These people threaten the French for two reasons. The first is that they not only do not share that nation’s common history, language and culture, but are actually antagonistic toward much of it. The second is that they do share something among themselves that the French long ago lost, namely a common transcendental belief system. This will give them a distinct advantage in the looming *Kulturkampf*, and the French know it.

Thus, France is a nation in trouble, with little on which to rely except a deeply corrupt political establishment, a giant, inefficient bureaucracy, an insane economic system, a waning patriotism, a dry spiritual well, and, of course, anti-Semitism, which has served all of Europe, along with the Slavic nations, so well over the years as a scapegoat for societal decay and governmental incompetence.

So don’t be “shocked” if “bigotry and xenophobia” become ever more a factor in French politics, with or without Le Pen. It’s okay to be distressed about it. But not “shocked!”

**SPEAKING OF THE FRENCH.** . . . I am usually loath to reprint any of the many amusing e-mail offerings that fly through cyberspace on such a regular basis, not because I don’t appreciate them but because I assume that anything I receive has probably already been received by most of my readers. But a week or so ago, my old pal Greg Smith sent me the following, along with a note informing me that “this is the kind of scoop you could be working on if you just had a platform.” (Greg persists in trying to be funny himself, even though I have told him many times over the years that he should leave that to me.)

Anyway, I thought it was hilarious, as Greg knew I would, and I got to thinking about it as I wrote the above piece. So, here it is, for your enjoyment.

Associated Press : For Immediate Release: March, 2002

### French Intellectuals to be Deployed in Afghanistan to Convince Taliban of Non-Existence of God

Kabul--The clean-up portion of the ground war in Afghanistan heated up yesterday when the Allies revealed plans to airdrop a platoon of crack French existentialist philosophers into the country to destroy the morale of the remaining Taliban zealots by proving the non-existence of God.

Elements from the feared Jean-Paul Sartre Brigade, or 'Black Berets', will be parachuted into the combat zones to spread doubt, despondency and existential anomie among the enemy. Hardened by numerous intellectual battles fought during their long occupation of Paris's Left Bank, their first action will be to establish a number of sidewalk cafes at strategic points near the front lines.

There they will drink coffee and talk animatedly about the absurd nature of life and man's lonely isolation in the universe. They will be accompanied by a number of heartbreakingly beautiful girlfriends who will propagate fear, uncertainty and doubt by looking remote and unattainable.

Their leader, Colonel Marc-Ange Belmondo, spoke yesterday of his confidence in the success of their mission. Sorbonne graduate Belmondo, a very intense and unshaven young man in a black pullover, gesticulated wildly and said, "The Taliban are caught in a logical fallacy of the most ridiculous proportions. There is no God and I can prove it."

Marc-Ange plans to deliver an impassioned thesis on man's inescapable lack of freedom of action, with special reference to the work of Foucault and the films of Alfred Hitchcock.

However, humanitarian agencies have been quick to condemn the operation as inhumane, pointing out that the effects of passive smoke from the Frenchmen's endless Gauloises and Gitanes could wreak a terrible toll on civilians in the area.

THE BEST LAID PLANS OF MICE AND MEN . . . Not surprisingly, being a farmer myself, I have paid considerable attention to the farm bill that is wending its way through Congress, hoping against hope that there might be an obscure provision tucked away in it somewhere that would provide me a small governmental stipend, say a couple hundred thousand dollars or so, for not raising any cotton, or peanuts, or even hogs on my place here in the Shenandoah Valley.

But, so far as I can tell, I was left out, which, I must confess, I don't understand. I mean, these guys, Republicans as well as Democrats, are planning to spend *an additional* \$73.5 billion on farm programs over the next 10 years, and I, a farmer, don't get anything?

That's *an additional* \$73.5 billion, by the way, meaning *in addition to* whatever they were going to spend anyway, which is not an easy number to find, not being included in any of the many articles I have read on the subject. I could look it up, but then I ask myself, "Why would I do that, and just make myself even more miserable than I am?"

Here's an old farm joke my Uncle Tony used to tell back in Iowa.

Three dogs are walking past a butcher shop, a Republican dog, a Democratic dog, and a farm dog.

The Republican dog says: "Let's go out to farmer Jones' house and get a job herding sheep. If we work all day, we'll make enough money to come back here this evening and buy three big steaks and have a feast."

The Democratic dog says: "Let's go in there, buy the steaks on credit, have a feast, take a long nap, and then maybe we could go out to Farmer Jones' tomorrow and talk to him about herding his sheep someday."

The farm dog says: "Let's just sit out here on our butts in front of the butcher shop and howl until he gives us the steak.")

In truth, my misery is not entirely because I am not getting any loot. I really didn't expect any, being a *small*, as opposed to being a *big* farmer. Nor am I unhappy because the *big* farmers are getting a lot. I've been around farmers all my life. I like farmers. I understand the problems they face and sympathize with them. So I would just as soon that they get the money as anyone else, given that there isn't a chance that the money, if not given to farmers, would be given back to the taxpayers who gave it to the government in the first place.

But, as a Republican, I must say that I am a little distressed to witness the failure of what I had thought back in 1995 was a terrific, even ingenious, GOP plan to capture more of the votes of America's farmers by weaning them off the government teat. That idea, as articulated by my good friend and political strategist *extraordinaire* Grover Norquist, went this way.

Most farmers are, by nature, conservative. But most of them vote for Democrats because Democrats are identified with giving away government money via things like "farm bills," and farmers, like everyone else, generally vote their pocketbook. So, Grover said, if Republicans could stop the government from giving lots of money to farmers, the farmers would, after an initial period of anger at the Republicans, eventually become Republicans themselves, having no need to be Democrats anymore since they no longer get any government money, and being naturally conservative, and because they would then be in favor of getting other "special interest groups" off the dole, since they themselves were no longer on it.

In theory, it was a terrific idea, and led to the passage of the “Freedom to Farm” act, put together by Congress in 1995 and passed in 1996, those wonderful two years when the GOP controlled both Houses in Congress for the first time in God knows when and before Newt lost his *cajones*. This act was to have phased out 60 years of farm subsidies, and as I said earlier, was to have converted all the nation’s farmers from Democrats to Republicans.

Then several not-so-funny things happened. Newt ran off, in 1998, with a lady who sings in the choir, farm prices plummeted in 1999, and Congress began pouring “emergency” money into bailout measures for farmers. As Robert Burns put it over 200 years ago:

The best laid plans of mice and men,  
gang aft agley,  
An’ lea’ us nought but grief an’ pain,  
for promised joy!

Oh well, says I, maybe I’ll get some of the loot next time. In the meantime, maybe I can quality for some free cheese.

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