



Joseph Sobran's

Washington Watch

The French Monster

The big news from Europe is the strong showing of Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of France's presidential election. With 17% of the vote, he knocked out the Socialist leader, Lionel Jospin, and finished just behind President Jacques Chirac (20%). Jospin immediately threw his support to Chirac for the runoff election.

Respectable opinion, in Europe and America, is shocked. For years it has been insisting that Le Pen is a new Hitler, though he fought in the French resistance against German occupation and has never advocated any hostile measures against Jews. In fact, his chief cause is the expulsion of illegal immigrants, which is to say, he wants to enforce the laws that are already on the books. Since most of these immigrants are Arabs who hate Israel, he even has some Jewish supporters.

Le Pen will probably lose the runoff by a landslide, since most of the other parties, along with the French media, are united against him. But he has exposed the political establishment's true colors, or rather color: pink. Like Pat Buchanan, he provokes a reaction that shows how monolithic that establishment really is. Socialists and "conservatives" are hardly distinguishable. They have no principles to prevent them from banding together to crush a genuine opponent of the status quo. All favor increased secularization of French culture and increased centralization of political and economic power.

Le Pen is, among other things, the only notable anti-abortion candidate in France. He's also the only one who is serious about fighting street crime, to which the illegals contribute heavily. But he's chiefly a nationalist who doesn't want France to be swallowed up in the European Union.

He owes his reputation to his enemies. He is best known for his notorious remark that the Holocaust was a "detail" of World War II. A French court fined him heavily for saying so, though he didn't deny that it had occurred; and after all, the voluminous war memoirs of Churchill, de Gaulle, and Eisenhower make only glancing references to Hitler's treatment of the Jews. (It wasn't even called "the Holocaust" until the late 1960s.)

Le Pen also has a glass eye, the result of a savage beating by a Communist mob some years ago. Such an experience would have caused most men to tone down their political views, if not to retire from public life altogether. But the media rarely mention this, and Le Pen gets no credit for courage.

In politics, any man who says what he really thinks is not only shocking but charismatic. This Le Pen is. He is also fast on his feet. When a British journalist taunted him to respond to Tony Blair's disparagement of him, he retorted that if elected, he would at once send France's illegal immigrants to England to enjoy Blair's hospitality.

Since I don't vote in rigged elections here, I can't say I'd vote for Chirac if I were French. But I must confess a sentimental preference for any politician who gives the slightest evidence that he possesses his own soul.