

BERNARD CASSEN

## ON THE ATTACK

*What are the origins of the movement that has developed so strongly in France against neoliberal globalization?*

THEY CRYSTALLIZED with the formation of ATTAC, which was an initiative of *Le Monde diplomatique*. In December 1997 Ignacio Ramonet, who edits the monthly, published an editorial entitled ‘Disarming the Markets’, in which he discussed the tyranny of financial markets, and ended with an appeal for the creation of a popular association to which he gave the name ATTAC—Association pour la Taxe Tobin pour l’Aide aux Citoyens. I had discussed this with him, having shortly before given a long lecture to the Parti Québécois about Tobin’s proposal for a tax on financial transactions. He wrote the article over a weekend and brought it in on Monday, and circulated it to all of us, as we always do at *Le Monde diplo*. When I saw the acronym ATTAC, I thought ‘oh, that’s great’. The rest of the editorial office was a bit cool, but I thought it a brain wave. When I asked Ignacio later why he had come up with ATTAC, he told me he had been thinking of one of Robert Aldrich’s movies, called *Attack*. So he conceived the acronym before he knew what it would stand for—which is the best way round.

The appeal was launched like a bottle into the sea, without any idea of what the reaction might be. But no sooner had the article appeared than we were deluged with phone calls and letters. I have never seen any article produce such a response. Normally, a piece in the paper will generate half a dozen letters, and in rare cases—when the subject is particularly

sensitive, often to do with languages—a maximum of, say, forty. This time we were filling boxes with them, day after day. We were at a loss to know what to do. We had thrown out an idea, but it never occurred to us that it would be we ourselves who would create ATTAC. In the following issues we kept our readers informed and said we were making contacts, partly to gain time. But by March 1998 the pressure from them was so great we realized there was nothing to be done: we would have to take responsibility for setting up the association, since there was such wide demand. As I had some organizational experience behind me, I was assigned the job of taking this in hand.

My first move was to bring together the organizations—not the individuals—that had responded to our appeal. This was a basic strategic choice: to build ATTAC out of existing structures, whether trade unions, civic associations, social movements or newspapers. We also drew in organizations that had not initially responded, such as the Peasant Confederation, with which I was on good terms, and other unions. Within six weeks of our first working session in March, the organizations concerned had agreed on the statutes, a political programme, and a provisional leadership. ATTAC was officially founded on 3 June 1998. Its founding members were essentially ‘legal persons’—that is, collective entities—to whom a few individuals like René Dumont, Manu Chao or Gisèle Halimi were added for symbolic effect. I was astonished by the speed with which the different organizations decided to take part, including trade-union committees not usually quick off the mark, and by the financial commitment that accompanied it, allowing us to set up an office and equip a secretariat. The periodicals involved, besides *Le Monde diplomatique*, included the Catholic weekly *Témoignage chrétien*, *Transversales*, *Charlie hebdo*, *Politis*, and a little later *Alternatives économiques*, a somewhat social-democratic monthly of good quality. So it was a slightly curious mosaic. But it was not conceived and has never operated as an organizational cartel, which would have finished it.

Once the creation of ATTAC was formally announced in the *Diplo*, people started to join it—by October 1998, when we held our first national get-together in La Ciotat, near Marseilles, there were 3,500 members, and the number has grown steadily ever since. We accepted as members ‘legal persons’, like trade unions, associations, firms or groups, and started to work on the Tobin tax, treating it as a symbolic terrain on which to raise questions about the way in which financial markets function.

Since Tobin was an establishment economist, a Nobel Prize-winner in economics from the United States at that, his proposal possessed a certain automatic initial legitimacy, serving to highlight the scandalous character of the flows of global speculation today. So for the purposes of agitation, it makes an excellent weapon. But, of course, we never for a second thought that the Tobin tax was the one solution to the dictatorship of financial markets. It was just one point of entry to attack them.

Today the national organization of ATTAC has some 30,000 members, but in addition there are also more than 200 local committees all over France, constituted as legal bodies—ATTAC-Pays Basque, ATTAC-Touraine, ATTAC-Marseilles, and so on—in their own right, with democratic rules that we impose on them, in exchange for use of the acronym. They sprang up spontaneously, and a bit chaotically. So one might have 500 members, another 50. But a compact will shortly be signed by each committee with the national association, regulating relations between them. The national leadership—the executive committee of ATTAC—sets the political framework, issues statements, animates campaigns, etc. But if it decides to organize a day of demonstrations against the WTO, nothing will happen unless the local committees want it to. In that sense they are the backbone of the organization.

The result is a situation of dual power. The local committees are independent of us. Each has a president, a secretary, a treasurer. Likewise we are independent of them. A kind of dynamic tension exists between the two poles. The dream of some of the committees would be to constitute themselves into a federation, more or less like a party or a trade union. Although I was far from anticipating everything—indeed I didn't foresee the emergence of the committees themselves—I did sense that problems could arise here, and so I proposed national statutes that on first sight may seem undemocratic, but in my view are by no means so. There are 30 members of the national executive, of whom 18 are elected by the 70 founders of ATTAC, and 12 by the 30,000 membership at large. The reason for this structure is that the founders themselves were very diverse. They include the Peasant Confederation, civil-service trade unions, social movements like *Droits Devant!*, or the unemployed. There is no movement in the streets that is not a founder member of ATTAC. We reckoned that if all these forces agreed on a line of action and a leadership, they would give balance and stability to ATTAC, thus creating a framework that allowed smaller movements at regional level to develop

freely. In the localities, you may find the phenomenon of ‘entryism’—organized political groups joining the local committees to try to take them over. So far, they have always failed. But with our national structure, power is not there to be taken; it is proof against raids. It was crucial to make it clear from the start that tactics of that kind wouldn’t work. So, last November, we elected a new executive—18 people picked by the founders, forming a blocked list on which the individual members could only vote yes or no, and 12 chosen by the membership, voting for whoever they wanted.

Since its foundation in 1998 ATTAC has not only seen an impressive growth in France, it has also spread spontaneously outside the country. Today ATTAC groups exist in all EU member states, and in some of the countries that will join in 2004—Poland, Hungary. Its growth has been particularly strong in the Nordic countries, which was a major surprise for us, since this zone has such strong free-trade traditions. But ATTAC has swept through Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. In Germany, ATTAC has some 10,000 members and in Italy it is at the heart of the ‘no-globo’ movement. In 1999 we convoked the first ATTAC-Europe meeting in Paris, which we have since built into a permanent network. Britain is an exception, since there the ground is already occupied by powerful NGOs like Oxfam, Friends of the Earth and War on Want on the one hand, and by a particularly active far-left group, the SWP—working through Globalize Resistance—on the other. For a British version of ATTAC to be formed, one would need the prior involvement of trade unions and intellectuals outside these sectors. Beyond Europe, ATTAC has already sprung up in Quebec, in Africa, in most Latin American countries and in Japan, and last year in Porto Alegre we organized a world meeting of the different ATTACs—nearly all of which have adopted the same model as the French original. We are meeting again in January 2003.

*How do you define the aims of ATTAC?*

Some months after we formed ATTAC in France, I proposed a formula which seems to have caught on—ATTAC Italy has even put it in its statutes. I call ATTAC an ‘action-oriented movement of popular education’. The notion of popular education is an old one in France, that goes back to the 19th century. The Ligue de l’Enseignement was formed in 1866, and many other organizations were created thereafter. By the end of the

20th century they were suffering an identity crisis, but the idea remains a powerful one, which ATTAC has taken over and adapted to globalized conditions. What does it mean today? Essentially, that militants must be well-informed, intellectually equipped for action. We don't want people turning out on demonstrations without really knowing why. So ATTAC members aren't activists in the French sense of the term, which differs from the English, since its connotation is action for action's sake. Our work is in the first instance—though not the last—educational. If you look at the ATTAC website on any given day, what you'll see is a list of a dozen meetings, conferences and debates. To make sure this mission is properly carried out, we have a scientific committee with very demanding standards that produces or checks the accuracy of the books or leaflets that ATTAC puts out. This is one of the reasons for the high level of credibility that ATTAC enjoys in the media and with politicians.

*In the political establishment?*

In September 2001, shortly before the Ecofin meeting in Liège, Fabius—then Minister of Finance in the Jospin government—asked us to come and see him about the Tobin tax. When we arrived, there were six senior officials from the Treasury already present in the waiting room. With them, Fabius started to grill us about the tax, enquiring how it could be levied in practice, and suggesting it was technically impossible to do so. We explained that this was far from the case: that there are at least three different ways of enforcing it, and one of the best would be through the European Central Bank itself. Fabius said he had no authority over the ECB, which we of course knew. I replied, 'We are prepared to demonstrate against the ECB in Frankfurt to support you'. He could see that we were well prepared for any question he could throw at us. In general, of course, French politicians are thoroughly ignorant about the realities of globalization. Many ATTAC members know more about the WTO than our parliamentarians.

*Do you have relays within the political parties?*

Yes, in both the National Assembly and the Senate, as well as in the European Parliament, where we have a coordinating committee of ATTAC members, composed of a representative of each party of the Left—a Socialist, a Communist, a Green, a Radical, a Chevènementiste. We even have a right-wing deputy: Maurice Leroy from the department

of Loire-et-Cher. Some, though not all, of these people are viewed with suspicion by the leadership of their respective organizations.

*You've given an idea of the scale and organization of ATTAC. How would you describe the social base of its membership?*

That's a good question. We don't really have reliable data on the sociology of ATTAC in France, we have at best some opinion polls and samples. But *grosso modo* you can say that we are an association recruited from the lower-middle classes upwards, above all in the public services, with a significant proportion of students and teachers, but employees and executives of the private sector are also present. We also have a sprinkling of farmers and unemployed. What we do not possess—any more than anyone else—are roots in the working class, or popular sectors more broadly. This is an acute general problem in France, just as I imagine it is in Britain. There is a terrible crisis of working-class representation in the political arena, as you can see from the number of former voters of the Left who now cast their ballots for Le Pen—if they bother to vote at all. We have little or no impact as yet on these categories. We are trying to find ways to do so, via member organizations that work directly on problems of social vulnerability, so we can address those who are the first victims of neoliberal globalization more effectively. But it is still very difficult to explain to an unemployed youngster of 18 all the connexions between his immediate plight and the role of the IMF or WTO. We need to develop ways of getting our message across vividly and accessibly, without denaturing it. Our problem is that our resources—the human energies at our disposal—are still too small for the pressures on us, which are enormous.

*What about the age structure of the base of ATTAC?*

That's our second weakness. The generational profile of ATTAC is not good. We don't have accurate figures yet—a proper study will be made in 2003—but I would guess that young people, that is, under 35, don't amount to more than perhaps 25–30 per cent of the total membership. Of course, parties and trade unions have the same problem: they fail to attract youth. People say the younger generation will only go to rock concerts, but the truth is more complicated. In June 2000, during a big rally in Millau in support of José Bové and his comrades of the Peasant Confederation, an ATTAC conference on financial institutions—not

exactly the sexiest subject—drew 3,000 people, most of them very young. In principle ATTAC can attract these energies, which you could see in the big anti-Le Pen demonstrations last May. But this is a youth culture that is difficult to capture in any organized form. You see a generation that goes from one big demonstration to another—Genoa, Barcelona, Florence—without ever really engaging in day-to-day activities, in a kind of political zapping. Then in reaction against this channel-surfing sensibility, you get the super-politicization of small nuclei who often take the lead in the streets, as in Genoa or Florence. But a political generation is never formed overnight, so something more durable may arise out of this mixture.

*Tracking back a little, what are the origins of Le Monde diplomatique itself, as the progenitor of ATTAC?*

The paper was created in 1954, as a monthly supplement to *Le Monde*, covering international affairs. By 1973 it had some 40,000 readers. The big change came with the death of the then editor of the paper, François Honti. At that point Claude Julien, the former head of the foreign desk of *Le Monde*, who had taken a sabbatical from the paper, was given the editorship of *Le Monde diplomatique*. Julien promptly made something completely different out of the journal, with a radical line against imperialism, neoliberalism, privatization. I and Ignacio Ramonet joined the staff from that moment onwards. Julien edited the paper for 17 years, retiring in 1990, when Ignacio succeeded him.

Throughout these years, the *Diplo* had no independent legal existence—it was simply an annexe of the daily. But by the nineties we were no longer satisfied with this, and in 1995–6 we achieved the goal of a separate status. A new company was formed, in which 49 per cent of the shares were taken by the readers and staff of the journal—a lot of money was raised to help us—while 51 per cent were kept by the daily. Under French law, 33 per cent of the equity of a company constitutes a blocking minority, which can veto changes in its articles of association or capital structure. So our aim was to bolt the independence of the journal securely against any alteration without our consent. The *Diplo* is now a highly successful enterprise. It sells 225,000 a month on average. Like ATTAC, but on a much larger scale, it has grown from a national into an international phenomenon. There are now 23 different editions of the journal abroad: in Europe, Latin America, the Arab world, Korea. There

are also more than 20 internet editions, notably in Japanese, Chinese and Russian. In these different versions, the world-wide circulation of the *Diplo* is 1.5 million. We have a global readership.

*The political discrepancy between the daily and the monthly has widened over the years?*

That's true in many areas. Today our relationship with *Le Monde* is purely administrative. The daily is the majority shareholder of the monthly, and represented on its board. But it has no power of interference in what we publish, which is occasionally unpalatable to some at *Le Monde*—under French law, it is the editor who is responsible for the contents of a publication. At the same time, while some journalists at the daily may—and do—dislike the radicalism of the monthly, it completely respects our independence. It also benefits financially from the success of the *Diplo*, since we pay the daily a million francs a year for the right to use its name, in a franchise that runs for 25 years, plus the price of the technical services—printing, accounting, distribution—that we buy from it, and of course the dividends. So although some of the shareholders of *Le Monde* are certainly furious at the *Diplo*, and no doubt ask Jean-Marie Colombani—editor of the daily and head of the conglomerate it now controls—why he allows it to be published, it is actually in *Le Monde's* interest to permit this voice, which sometimes contradicts it, to flourish. Colombani likes to say: '*Le Monde diplomatique* is a journal of opinion; *Le Monde* is a journal of opinions'. Projecting an image of pluralism is not just a personal stand, but an institutional requirement, since *Le Monde* is building a media conglomerate that is increasingly diversified in its interests.

*The World Social Forum is often thought to be a joint creation of ATTAC in France and the PT in Brazil. Is that so?*

In February 2000 two Brazilian friends visited me in Paris. One, Oded Grajew, was a former entrepreneur. The other, Chico Whitaker, was the secretary to the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Council of Brazilian bishops. They said they had been to Davos, and they asked, 'Why don't *Le Monde diplomatique* and ATTAC organize a counter-Davos?' I replied: 'That's already been tried, at Davos itself. But access to the place is tightly controlled, the Swiss police are murder, and to organize a counter-Davos in France doesn't make much sense.' Then an idea

suddenly occurred to me, and I said: ‘We need a symbolic rupture with everything Davos stands for. That has to come from the South. Brazil has the ideal conditions for doing so, as a Third World country with gigantic urban concentrations, a wretched rural population, but also powerful social movements and friendly political bases in many cities. Why don’t we launch something in Porto Alegre, as a symbol of the alternatives to neoliberalism?’ Two years before, I had written an article on the participatory budget of the PT administration and I knew the setting fairly well. Then I added—journalistic instinct speaking—‘we should call it the World Social Forum, to challenge the World Economic Forum, and hold it on the same day of the same month of the year’.

That took all of three minutes. My friends said: ‘You’re right. Let’s do it in Brazil.’ So they contacted the then mayor of Porto Alegre, Tarso Genro, and the then governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Olivio Dutra, as well as social organizations in São Paulo, to get the project off the ground. In May I joined them all in Brazil. We still had to decide how best to launch the project publicly. ATTAC alone could not do it. But in June there was the UN Social Summit in Geneva, at which dozens of non-governmental organizations were due to be present, offering an ideal opportunity. So in the closing session of the conference, Miguel Rossetto, then vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul, launched an appeal for the World Social Forum which provoked an enthusiastic response. (Incidentally, Tarso, Olivio and Miguel are now members of the Lula government.) Six months later, miraculously, the Forum came into being.

*What was the geographical map of the first Forum?*

The practical organization of the Forum was at first essentially a Brazilian operation, with the back-up of ATTAC-France. In purely geographical terms, its range was limited. But in media terms, its impact was enormous, because it coincided with the meeting of global elites in Davos. They, of course, assumed that they possessed complete legitimacy and tried to dismiss the meeting in Porto Alegre as a mere leftist rant. But when they had to accept the challenge of televised debates and were trounced, the tables were turned on them. Jospin had sent down two junior Ministers to see what was going on—since there were over 300 French participants—and on the first or second day admitted that there were two Forums, one Economic and the other Social, putting them on

the same level. So Porto Alegre was a huge success in terms of sheer international publicity.

On the other hand, I said at the time that it should be considered as number zero in the series, which ought properly to start with the sequel as the real first one, because representation from Asia, Africa and even the United States was so weak. I personally made no particular effort to ensure a strong American presence, or to hinder it. But when the American NGOs, who had been informed just like all others throughout the world, arrived only in small numbers, I was not worried. Globalization is an essentially American-led process, and it was important that anti-globalization not be American-led as well. So in my view it was strategically vital that the Forum started along a Franco-Brazilian, and then more broadly Euro-Latin American axis, which the Americans were welcome to join once the ground was well prepared. Otherwise there was a risk that American NGOs would immediately dominate the proceedings.

The attitude of many of them was summed up by Peter Marcuse from Columbia University, who remarked that since the Forum wasn't a US initiative, not a few American groups thought it couldn't be important, and didn't go. They were mistaken, of course, and next time they showed up in force. But by then the framework of the Forum had been secured. Although most anti-globalization activists come from the North, Western Europe or America, for our purposes it was crucial to kick off from the South. We could then incorporate American contingents in a movement that already had its own vocabulary, concepts and slogans, and could draw on support from Latin American forces, for a homogeneous outlook. Our problem now, of course, is to extend that to Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

*What has been the role of the PT in all this?*

At first, the PT was a bit uneasy about the Forum, because its tradition is quite 'vertical', and it was afraid that a Forum organized in Porto Alegre, which it did not control, might somehow be used against it. On one of my trips to Brazil, Lula asked to see me. We met in the Hotel Gloria in Rio. He had his aide Marco Aurelio Garcia (now his foreign policy adviser) with him, who did most of the talking with me. Instead of discussing the Forum and its relationship with the PT, I talked about

ATTAC and its relation to political parties in France. Each of us knew that we were talking about the same thing. I explained that ATTAC was an association, not a party, and kept its distance from organized political forces, though it was not against them. He got the message, and the next day I was informed by Marco Aurelio that he supported the Forum. But the PT as such has never played any role—none whatever—in the leadership of the Forum. On the contrary, the Brazilian committee contains people thoroughly hostile to any interference from political parties or groups, even if some, if not all of them are members of the PT themselves. A couple of times Olivio Dutra, as PT governor of Rio Grande do Sul, asked one of his aides to ring me in France to find out what the Brazilian committee was up to. So the PT has had no part in either the concept, or the content, of the World Social Forum.

*Nevertheless, PT control of the administration in Rio Grande do Sul and Porto Alegre was presumably of material importance for the infrastructure of the Forums. Is this now threatened by the party's loss of power in Rio Grande do Sul?*

It's too early to say. The support of the city, where the PT is still in power, remains. Rigotto, the new PMDB governor, has said he will continue to help the Forum, but it must become 'more open'. Obviously, there is no question of changing it, so in practice this means he will drastically reduce the level of assistance to it. Perhaps the new federal government will step into the breach, but all speakers in the Third Forum have been told that they must pay their own expenses. There will be difficulties, but the Forum itself is not at risk. Rigotto is well aware that shopkeepers, hotels, taxis in Porto Alegre—services in general—benefit hugely from the Forum. A move against it would be very unpopular locally.

*How do you assess the impact 9.11 and the war on terrorism have had on the Social Forum?*

Only four months elapsed between September 11 and the second Forum in January 2002, and for a few days after the attentat there was a certain disorientation among ATTAC militants in France. But then Bush did us a service by explaining that anti-globalization movements were anti-American movements. After that there were twice as many participants in the second Forum, where some three thousand organizations were represented. So in that sense, the war on terrorism just strengthened

our determination not to be intimidated. The more belligerent Bush becomes, the more violent the reaction he is liable to provoke. In France too, steps are being taken to criminalize social movements and NGOs—not terrorists—while in Italy anti-globalization militants are already being arrested. The attack on the WTC has given Bush and hawks everywhere a chance to restrict civil liberties, and cover up bad economic news. The movement understood that quite quickly, and has resisted this pressure pretty well.

*To what extent do you think it possible to separate the original agenda of the World Social Forum from the global military offensive of the United States?*

The theme of war has entered the prospect of the Forum, and it is important—but not all-important. War or peace, the problems of globalization remained essentially the same on September 10 and September 12: hunger, debt, inequality, AIDS. What we see now is a reconfiguration within the neoliberal order to the advantage of the United States. Europe and Japan, of course, are embarked on the same boat of globalization as the US. But aboard it, there are people who have tried to adopt measures that have nothing to do with neoliberalism, like the 35-hour week. The new conjuncture has allowed America to reassert control over its allies—I would even say that the principal target of the current American offensive is less Iraq than its ‘partners’. All this has its place in the Forum, but it will not monopolize it. If the first Forum was an occasion for analysis and critique, and the second for proposals, the third will be for strategy. The questions will be much more operational: what is to be done? The issue of war will be very important, but it will not be as dominant as it was in Italy, at the European Forum in Florence, where it overshadowed everything else.

*Were you really surprised by that?*

The prospect of war is a much more burning issue in Italy than in France, not least because there are US military bases there, which is not the case in our country. At Florence it was sometimes said that there was no anti-war mobilization in France because ATTAC prevented one, which is ridiculous. The fact is that Chirac has made protest difficult here by appearing to resist American pressures. That has made him very popular in the Arab world, and reduced the potential for French demonstrations against him, though this may not last very long. In Italy,

the situation is quite different. War is an absolutely central issue there, but against a background of major social struggles, wide detestation of Berlusconi, and a powerful trade-union movement led by the CGIL. The context is much more effervescent than in France, and the theme of war has become a virtual obsession. Knowing that the Forum would be held in Italy, and that Rifondazione would mobilize around the issue, we all agreed that war would be a leading theme in Florence, alongside its original slogan: 'We Need a Different Europe'. But then we discovered that all the posters for the march spoke only of war, without mentioning Europe. I can't say I was entirely surprised. But if the Forum had been held in France, it would not have gone like this. War would have been on the agenda, but not an obsession with war. Because whether war breaks out or not, B-52s and special forces will not alter poverty in Brazil or hunger in Argentina.

*Isn't the contrast you've drawn a bit paradoxical? After all, the Italian state—even under Berlusconi—plays a very minor role in the current wave of Western military interventions, whereas the French state has participated full-bore in every one of them: in the Gulf, the Balkans, Afghanistan and maybe tomorrow Iraq. An Italian might say: this may not be ATTAC's issue, but the fact is that the French Left has a very weak record of resistance to wars of any kind, from Indochina and Algeria onwards.*

True enough. In France, the conversion of the Communist Party to the nuclear *force de frappe* in the 1970s—when it was still the largest and most powerful party of the Left—was a watershed. Pacifist traditions of any kind are virtually non-existent in Paris, and there were never any mass struggles against nuclear weapons, as you had in Britain. Today, there is unanimity in the political establishment behind the French nuclear arsenal. On the other hand, if there is a war against Iraq, there will be mass protests—I am completely sure of that. Chirac has little to gain and a lot to lose if he takes part in an American expedition, because he has gained quite a bit by appearing to oppose one so far. But, judging by his past behaviour, he is quite capable of doing so.

*How would you situate ATTAC historically? For a long time France was the country in Europe to which nearly all others—the Italians were perhaps an exception—looked for a political lead. This is a tradition that goes back to 1789, 1830, 1848, 1871, right on down to 1968. Thereafter it appeared to fade away. Should one see ATTAC as in its own way a revival of this*

*lineage—a French creation and initiative, in a period of deep reaction, that rapidly acquired a broad international resonance?*

I've emphasized the way in which it was made possible by the impact of *Le Monde diplomatique*, which had already gained an international audience before ATTAC was created. But it is also rooted in another and much older tradition within French society, which is *la fonction publique*. In France public services—education, transport, utilities—are not only a technical mode of delivering goods to citizens, but a bond of social solidarity: what makes possible the 'republican pact' that creates national cohesion. Attachment to these services lies very deep in French culture, as one could see in the great strike movement of 1995, which was essentially a public-sector phenomenon. When the Paris metro shut down, it would take people here about three hours every day to get from Vincennes, where I live, to work in the city, and another three to get home again. But—this was the fantastic thing—it was as if the public-sector workers were striking for everyone else. It was a kind of proxy strike. Far from there being any complaints, the movement was hugely popular. That was why the government had to beat a retreat.

What one could see very clearly was that in popular consciousness, the public services are the first line of defence of the citizenry. They knew immediately that if these services were taken apart, they would be next for the chop. Of course, the battle over these services is worldwide. The drive to privatize them has two aims, which the European Commission scarcely takes the trouble to conceal. What are they? First, to put an end to a situation where banks and insurance companies see large sums of money circulating under their nose, in pension or security systems over which they have no control. The very thought of it makes them ill. Second, to whittle down the forces of resistance to neoliberalism. Public-sector employees have legal rights to strike and use them. If you can reduce their numbers, you weaken the possibility of any resistance to the neoliberal order.

ATTAC comes to a large extent out of this world, as its composition suggests—we are in our own way heirs of its traditions, and belong to its logic. But, of course, there was also the global conjuncture of the late nineties. Ignacio Ramonet wrote his editorial of December 1997 at the height of the Asian financial crisis, which was like a life-size illustration

of all the texts against globalization the paper had ever published. That too gave powerful credibility to the launching of ATTAC.

*The great strikes of 1995 in France, followed by the Asian financial crisis in 1997, explain why ATTAC was born well before Seattle. But there is still one puzzle about its emergence. If one looks at the official varieties of French politics over the past twenty years, from Mitterrand onwards, their centre of gravity has moved steadily to the right. Ironically it was Chirac who popularized the notion of la pensée unique as a stifling consensus, before becoming one of its most prominent examples. Whether governments have been nominally of the Left or Right, the policies have remained the same. With every election, the voters rejected the government that pursued this programme, and the new government then carries on as before. How do you explain this strange paradox: a radical tradition that is far from spent, and finds expression in one of the strongest movements of protest in Europe, yet apparently has no impact on the immovable cupola of French politics?*

That's a very complex question, to which I can do no more than give a few elements of an answer—it really demands a longer and more theoretical reflection. But in the first instance you have to remember the weight of the historic division between Right and Left in French life—it is virtually consubstantial with our political tradition. These are categories that live on after their content has declined or disappeared. So there is always a sector of opinion for which a bad government of the Left—any such government—is preferable to a good government of the Right. You can see this reflex at work in every municipal and legislative election in France. It is powerfully reinforced by the two-round voting system. There is no chance of changing this overnight.

Then there has been the enthusiastic neoliberal turn of Social-Democracy in France, as elsewhere, which has often made governments of the Left as zealous for deregulation and privatization as governments of the Right. Part of the reason for that difference is that the number one pressure for liberalization has come from the European Union, to which social-democrats were in many cases more favourable than conservatives. In France, as Alain Touraine candidly admitted, the word 'liberal' could for a long time not be spoken. So a substitute was found for it: 'Europe'. Things could be done in the name of Europe that would never have got through otherwise. In this sense, Europe was the Trojan horse of neoliberalism in France. You can see this very clearly in the case

of Mitterrand's presidency. In 1988, after he was re-elected President, the first European directive on the free movement of capital in the EU came into force. It had been approved by Balladur as Minister of Finance during the cohabitation of the previous government. Now the PS was back in office again, and Bérégovoy went to Mitterrand and asked him: '*Monsieur le Président*, what should I do? Ought I to fight for a directive harmonizing taxation of capital in the Community, as a safeguard?' To which Mitterrand simply replied: 'Bérégovoy, are you for Europe or against it?' Bérégovoy understood he had no choice. Mitterrand deliberately opted for a neoliberal Europe rather than no Europe at all. But he had, after all, a conception of Europe that dated from the immediate post-war period.

This kind of outlook influenced all the parties, including the Communists. *Le Monde diplomatique* and ATTAC have developed a consistent critique of it, with arguments that have crystallized into an active framework of education and action, in an international context where they have real resonance. It is perfectly true that we have had little impact on the French governments to date. But we always thought of a medium-term strategy, and never paid much attention to the electoral cycle in France. The elites don't care much about us, but movements and citizens do. Still, our target audience is ultimately international, rather than national. Our fundamental aim, as I have often said, is to decontaminate people's minds. Our heads have been stuffed with neoliberalism, its virus is in our brain cells, and we need to detoxify them. We have to be able to start thinking freely again, which means believing that something can be done. For the overwhelming conviction at present is that, politically speaking, nothing can be done. That is why our slogan, 'Another world is possible', amounts to something like a cultural revolution. It means that we are not condemned to neoliberalism, we can envisage other ways of living and organizing society than those we have at present. So our task is to persuade the largest number of people possible of the viability of such alternatives, and prepare the ground for a Gramscian hegemony that would allow different policies to be realized.

For the moment, our influence is considerable at the level of public opinion in general, and finds some echo in the political parties, even of the Right. But there is still very little advance there. This morning I had to give a talk to a conference of the PS, whose first session was devoted to the question: 'what forms of organization do we need?', while the second

asked 'what kind of ideas do we need?' As if you could decide matters in that order! I told them that for us the basic line of division is what attitude one takes to neoliberal globalization. So long as you are not clear about that, you might as well give up—there is no *juste milieu* that will allow you to evade the issue: saying yes to the Commission and no to the IMF is a farce that no longer fools anyone. The majority of the audience was openly hostile, of course. But a strong minority is beginning to listen, and to ask questions. Intellectually, we have by and large won the game, as you can see from the titles that sell in French bookshops.

*What explains the strange default of the French political class as a whole in the arena of foreign policy, where in the last years it seems to have lost its strategic capacity completely? The current enlargement of the EU is a dramatic example. What can the French elites gain from a Europe of 25 members—with the United States openly demanding that Turkey, as the launching pad for a war on Iraq, be admitted in short order too? It is no mystery why the English elites are happy with this prospect, since they have always wanted to dilute the Community. But what has happened to their French counterparts, that they accept it so passively?*

The debate on Europe has always been very different in France from every other continental country, where there was a consensus in favour of integration, uniting Christian and Social Democrats. That did not exist in France, where there was a sharp division between most Social Democrats and the local equivalent of Christian Democrats, on the one hand, and Gaullists and Communists on the other. This is a structural cleavage which put paid to the European Defence Community in 1954, and has to a large extent persisted to this day. The partisans of Europe have never commanded a secure majority, and so they never wanted Europe to be really discussed. They feared that any concrete, detailed debate might give weapons to their adversaries, and so they always avoided it. Because they were always on the defensive, there was very little public discussion of Europe in France, till the late eighties. Then, in 1992, Mitterrand decided to stage a referendum on the Treaty of Maastricht. There was a tremendous political and media barrage in favour: practically every newspaper called for a yes vote, every television channel pummelled the same message home, most public figures declared their support. Yet in the end, 49 per cent of those who voted rejected the Treaty. So it squeaked through by a miracle. For good reasons and bad, popular opinion did not follow instructions from on high.

That is why none of the succeeding treaties—Nice and the like—have been submitted to a referendum. The chances of losing were too high.

So there was no debate about Europe in France because the pro-Europeans regarded themselves as a fortress under siege, and did not want to air issues that might expose divisions among them, or assist their opponents. Today there is zero discussion of enlargement—absolutely zero—because that is what makes life easy for transnational companies and financial markets. ATTAC defines enlargement as a structural-adjustment plan, along IMF lines, for Eastern Europe. The Washington Consensus comes by different names these days: in Western Europe we have the ECB and the Stability Pact, in the South it is structural adjustment, in Eastern Europe it is the incorporation of the *acquis communautaire*. Since the Nice summit of December 2000, ATTAC has had many workshops on Europe in progress. We have produced documents and demonstrated for another vision of Europe, and will certainly intervene on the terrain of the Constitution that Giscard's convention in Brussels is now confecting.

*In the theoretical debates over global neoliberalism, what was Pierre Bourdieu's role—has the organization he created, Raisons d'Agir, played a significant flanking part alongside ATTAC?*

Raisons d'Agir is one of the founding members of ATTAC, and Bourdieu's work has always been a key point of reference for us. Institutionally, however, he kept his distance. We asked him, without success, to address one general assembly of ATTAC. He had his own circle, not to speak of a court, and hoped to inspire a European social movement. Actually his idea of a European Estates-General came true, but at the Social Forum in Florence, out of a movement he had not foreseen. I saw him once at Millau, but never had a conversation with him. Sadly, just before he died, we had finally arranged to have lunch together. It's a great pity that a closer connexion between Bourdieu and ATTAC was never made, because it would have had a lot of impact.

*How do you assess the balance of forces on the wider French intellectual scene, where a whole series of best sellers attacking la pensée unique coexist with the ubiquitous media prominence of its chief exponents, not least in Le Monde itself?*

On television and in the press and leading publishing houses, you continue to see the same familiar faces and names everywhere: Philippe Sollers, Alain Minc, Bernard-Henri Lévy, André Glucksmann, Alexandre Adler—not to speak of Cold War veterans like Jean-François Revel. But this media galaxy plays for a middle-brow public, it has little credibility in the intelligentsia proper, based mainly in the educational system. It operates as a mutually supportive mafia, which has been very well described by Serge Halimi in his book *Les nouveaux chiens de garde*—it sold a quarter of a million copies, which gives you an idea of how this coterie is viewed by the great majority of what Régis Debray has called the *bas-clergé* of the French intellectual class. In this layer, my guess is that opinion has been moving strongly in our direction—especially perhaps among economists. Whereas the neoliberal paradigm was completely hegemonic up to a few years ago, now it is strongly challenged, as you can see from the widespread reception of the Fitoussi Report.

*How do you see the next phase of development for ATTAC and the World Social Forum?*

The World Social Forum is not an entity, but a process—a snowballing momentum that is bringing together forces which, though developing in the same direction, were without mutual contact and often completely unaware of each other. A global constellation is coming into being that is beginning to think along the same lines, to share its strategic concepts, to link common problems together, to forge the chains of a new solidarity. All this is now moving with astonishing speed. There has just been an Asian Social Forum in India, an area with which we hitherto had virtually no contact. In Brazil, the government's agenda is set by all the problems identified at Porto Alegre. What will Lula do about the enormous debt that is crushing the country? He has said, of course, that Brazil will be meticulous in meeting its obligations. But will it actually be able to? I believe that a moment of truth is arriving in Argentina and Brazil, which could create the conditions for a radical, world-wide revision of the neoliberal order. If the President of Brazil were to say, 'we are no longer going to pauperize our citizens to pay foreign bond-holders', and Argentina and other Latin American countries followed him, what would happen? Wall Street could do very little about it, since as a leading banker has admitted privately, 'Brazil is too big to fail'. The banks would have little alternative but to 'save the furniture', and accept losses of 30 or 40 per cent rather than write off 100 per cent of their investments.

As for France, Chirac got less than a fifth of the electorate in the first round of the Presidential elections, and the Right that is now in power only just over a third. The political base of the new regime is very, very weak. The government is already extremely nervous, as it sees signs of social tension mounting, particularly about pensions. It is not looking for a confrontation. Growth is slowing to a crawl, the Stability Pact is strangling consumption, fixed costs are rising. If Chirac tries to increase taxes to cover the deficit, there will be an outcry at his betrayal, after so many electoral promises not to; if he tries to slash public expenditure, he will be heading once again for a showdown in the streets. The Right is caught in this dilemma, and its logic is explosive.

What we are seeing today is a movement that, for the first time, is adopting the same perspectives, hitting at the same targets, and developing all over the world, linking local struggles to global objectives. History has accelerated so rapidly in the last ten or fifteen years that there is no reason to think it will stabilize now. I cannot help feeling that what we have achieved together so far will have some effect on what is to come.

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Previous texts in this series have been Subcomandante Marcos, 'The Punch Card and the Hourglass' (NLR 9); Naomi Klein, 'Reclaiming the Commons' (NLR 9); John Sellers, 'Raising a Ruckus' (NLR 10); José Bové, 'A Farmers' International?' (NLR 12); David Graeber, 'The New Anarchists' (NLR 13); Michael Hardt, 'Today's Bandung?' (NLR 14); João Pedro Stedile, 'Landless Battalions' (NLR 15); Walden Bello, 'Pacific Panopticon' (NLR 16); Emir Sader, 'Beyond Civil Society' (NLR 17); Tom Mertes, 'Grass-Roots Globalism' (NLR 17) and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'New Revolts Against the System' (NLR 18).