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# Trends. France and the National Front: The Psychology of Fanaticism

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As this Issue of IBPP is being readied for posting, there is significant controversy in France over the political viability and morality of conservative politicians accepting support from the far-right National Front in regional assemblies. President Jacques Chirac, France's President, has strongly attacked accepting such support and has derogatorily termed the National Front's leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, a fanatic.

Whatever one might think about the charges of racism, national chauvinism, and xenophobia against the National Front, one should pause when considering the fanatic label. Often the term denotes excessive zeal and irrational attachment to a cause. Yet it is most often used towards people with whom one very strongly and substantively disagrees--as if some mild to moderate degree of divergence of substantive opinion, as opposed to means of implementation, may be grudgingly tolerated, but no more than that. And as if people with whom one agrees are less likely fanatics. This seems to especially be the case, since the descriptor irrational is less often employed to denote a significant disparity from normative reason and logic and more often employed to suggest a very strong difference of opinion at times linked with a hyper-reason and hyper-logic.

In any event, a significant implication and problem with the fanaticism term is the suggestion that there may be no opinions, beliefs, values, goals, and acts worth defending or attempting to achieve by all means necessary. Is this so? Should this be so? Are examples of fanaticism throughout history nothing more than oppositional counterpoints to what is now termed postmodernism?

There may be many appropriate verbal approaches in an attack on the French far-right. Fanaticism may even service these attacks, not constitute them. (See Mead, M. (1977). *Fanaticism: The panhuman disorder*. Etc., 34, 35-58; Milgram, S. (1977). *The social meaning of fanaticism*. Etc., 34, 58-61; Whitney, C.R. (March 25, 1998). *Chirac puts regional allies on the spot*. *The New York Times*, p. A9.) (Keywords: Fanaticism, France, National Front.)