

# Aux Armes Citoyens! Confronting the Extreme Right in French Public Libraries

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The intrusion of the extreme right-wing National Front party into French public libraries in the 1990s mobilized librarians to confront political interference and to defend the democratic values inherent in libraries. This paper reviews the actions of the extreme right in imposing their political ideology on library acquisitions and services, and the reactions they provoked. Their intervention called into question the mission of public libraries, political autonomy, acquisitions policies and practices, and the role of the librarian. French li-

brarians, the nation, and ultimately the international community were alerted to the National Front's subversion of libraries to a political agenda. These incidents triggered practical and philosophical responses as librarians developed strategies to combat political interference, confronted issues of censorship and the challenge of developing pluralistic collections, and asserted the librarian's role in safeguarding democratic principles. The response of library associations in France is also discussed.

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The library is a place for the public exercise of reason.  
- Gabriel Naudé, 1644.

[The library] is a privileged space that can exercise a profound ideological influence; don't underestimate this tool for the reconquest of the mind! [1]  
- Eric Stetten, Director of the Municipal Library of Orange, appointed by the National Front. 1997. (Gautier-Gentès 2000, 9)

## Introduction

In the spring of 2002, alarms sounded in France and beyond when a candidate from the extreme right-wing National Front party (*Front National*, FN) became a finalist in the presidential elections. Jean-Marie Le Pen was ultimately defeated, having gained 17.79% of votes cast, and France was thrown into a flurry of mobilization and self-examination. For many, the National Front represents a nationalist and racist movement that challenges France's democratic tradition. [2] The resurgence of the National Front brought a chilling reminder to many librarians of the threat public libraries can face when confronted by political ideologues.

Mayors from the National Front party were elected in four towns in the south of France in the mid 1990s, and quickly focused their attention on cultural institutions, including libraries. In an article by Catherine Bédarida in *Le Monde* on Oct 18, 1997, FN mayor Jacques Bompard asserts, "It is time to give a clean sweep to libraries as well as to other gearwheels of power." [3] As soon became apparent, the National Front sought to use libraries as a means of stifling opposing views and spreading their own political and cultural message. Significant media coverage brought the issue to international attention, and libraries became a symbolic terrain upon which democratic principles were defended. In defending freedom of access to information, however, librarians also confronted the dilemma of dealing with extremist literature, and the challenge of developing pluralistic collections.

This paper looks briefly at the ideology of the National Front, and reviews the incidents in the mid-1990s that called into question the mission of the public library and the role of librarians. Discussions and debates within the profession re-

sulted in suggested measures and practices to combat political interference, and raised important philosophical questions such as the mission of the public library, the meaning of pluralism in library collections, and the role of the librarian. In the face of the presidential elections of 2002, activist librarians mobilized once again to confront the threat posed by the National Front and to reaffirm their role in safeguarding the library as a tool for the exercise of democracy.

### *The rise of the National Front*

Founded in 1972 by members of the disaffected right, under the leadership of Algerian war veteran Jean-Marie Le Pen, the National Front maintains a nostalgic vision of the national past, an alarmist view of the present, and an extremist political agenda. Their literature describes a country in which the small shopkeepers, farmers, and traditional Catholic families of the 'true France' have been subverted by the forces of modernization and outside influences. Jewish conspiracies figure prominently in their propaganda, and homosexuals, artists, and intellectuals (including librarians) are likewise suspect. Their chief target, however, is the immigrant community. They blame immigrants, particularly from North and West Africa, for increasing crime and unemployment, and view cultural pluralism as a threat to national identity. In their view, the perceived degradation of the quality of life in France can be remedied only by an aggressive political agenda that restores traditional values and culture and rids the country of external influences (Le Pen 2000). They warn of "l'extinction biologique" and "genocide culturel" in reference to France's future, and propose severe limitations on the rights accorded to immigrants, if not actual deportation (Front National: le Parti de la France! 2003). Their cultural agenda is deeply conservative, denouncing modernism and multiculturalism. Declaiming in rhetoric laced with racism, violence, and nationalism, FN leaders show little tolerance for democratic thought and processes as they seek a return to an idealized French past. [4]

Support for the National Front has experienced an uneven but evident consolidation, despite internal struggles and premature announcements of their demise. In 1995, Le Pen won 15% of the first ballot for the presidential elections, and FN

mayors were elected in the towns of Orange, Vitrolles, Marignane and Toulon. By the late 1990s though, the FN appeared to be losing momentum as internal divisions, scandals and legal actions threatened dissolution of the party. Le Pen had been convicted of assaulting a socialist candidate while campaigning for the presidential election in 1997, and the party splintered with the formation of rival extremist groups such as the Mouvement National Républicain. In 2002, however, the FN was nonetheless poised to benefit from widespread disenchantment with the left, political fragmentation, and an electoral process in which the final candidacy goes to the top two candidates from a crowded field in the first round of elections. Stunning France and the world, FN candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen was one of two final candidates for the presidency. [5] Librarians, among others, had serious reason for concern.

### *"L'Affaire d'Orange"*

In the wake of the presidential elections of 2002, librarians recalled the intense friction with the National Front in the mid-1990s that ignited a fire that spread through the national and international press. In June 1995, FN candidate Jacques Bompard was elected mayor of the sunny city of Orange (pop 28,000) in southern France. Shortly afterwards, he turned his focus to the public library, instructing his cultural adjoint to inspect the collection to determine its political and social orientation. After the inspection, according to an article by Monique Glasberg in *Le Monde* on July 13, 1996, the mayor was incensed by what he considered the systematic "ostracism of books from the extreme right." [6] He then took matters into his own hands and decreed that the mayor's office would oversee book selection.

Concerned library staff and citizens brought this unorthodox (but not illegal) intervention to the attention of officials at the Ministry of Culture, which holds responsibility for the technical oversight of public libraries. Denis Pallier, then head of the Inspection Générale des Bibliothèques, was sent to investigate. According to his report, multiple copies of self-published works by FN sympathizers, such as Max Rodolphe François, were added. Though the library director judged these titles to be partisan and of insufficient literary merit, they were nonetheless put into the

collection. The report also describes the mandatory review of the proposed acquisitions list, from which the mayor's office purged books based on criteria that reflect the FN's political agenda. Annotations in the margins indicated the reasons for rejection: multiculturalism (e.g., a collection of fairy tales from around the world); lack of respect for "good morals" (e.g., a novel concerning homosexuality); and books by authors critical of the FN (e.g., historian Jean Lacouture), among others. Future acquisitions were to become the responsibility of a selection committee appointed by the mayor. Pallier's report confirmed allegations that the mayor's office usurped the librarian's role in collection development, and its blatantly political agenda compromised the library's ability to provide a pluralistic collection (Pallier 1996).

Orange, moreover, was not an isolated case. Reports of political interference in local libraries began surfacing in other towns controlled by the extreme right. The mayor of the town of Vitrolles adopted a similar agenda and established a reading committee to select library materials and thus short circuit the library staff (Lybrecht 1999). Jacques Follorou, writing in *Le Monde* on September 20, 1996, quotes the Marignane municipal adjoint Robert Egea as saying, "We were always regarded like the plague. It's time that we have the right to speak." [7] In claiming this right to speak, the mayor's office in Marignane examined library holdings through a political magnifying lens and proceeded to 'rebalance' the collection. As in Orange, this unwarranted political intrusion prompted an investigation by the Inspection Générale des Bibliothèques. The resulting report details the actions of the FN in the name of 'rebalancing' the collection: the left-leaning but mainstream newspapers *Libération*, *Nouvel Observateur*, and *La Marseillaise* were cancelled and replaced by the extreme right-wing publications *Présent*, *Rivarol* and *National Hebdo*; periodicals were organized and displayed in categories labeled by their political orientation, i.e., left, right, and "national" right (which is to say the extreme right); book selections were challenged (e.g., on topics such as homosexuality and Islam). A new library administration was put into place by the mayor's office, offering public programs favorable to the FN's agenda, such as anti-French racism and the "cretinism" of French culture, and placing increased restrictions on library access for

children (Pallier and Gautier-Gentès 1997). Staff not only suffered a systematic reduction of professional personnel, but were subject to verbal assaults and acts of vandalism such as slashed tires (Pittard 1999).

In truth, the FN is not the first, nor the only group, in recent history to mix politics and public libraries. A brief glance through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) *Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* (2001) provides numerous examples of contemporary political challenges to libraries. In France, as elsewhere, parties from both ends of the political spectrum have been guilty of using libraries to further their agendas by means of book selection, programming, and staffing. Marie Kühlmann describes incidents including acquisition of materials favorable to the party in power, removal of controversial materials, politically motivated personnel appointments, partisan programming, and reduction of funding (Kühlmann et al. 1989, 146–54). Though these incidents undeniably violate the principles of intellectual freedom, they were not perceived as part of a larger ideological strategy, nor were they accompanied by the FN's bullying tactics. Catherine Canazzi, former director of the municipal library in Orange, corroborates the experience of other library staff as she cites verbal threats, public humiliation, and other disturbing methods of intimidation the FN undertook in their attack on the library (Canazzi 1997). In any case, the actions of the FN in Orange and elsewhere succeeded in galvanizing the profession and launching an international *cause célèbre*.

### *Aux Armes Citoyens!*

The sleepy municipal library in Orange seems an unlikely candidate for international attention. In the mid-1990s, it consisted of two small rooms on the second floor of a side street, with a modest, somewhat dated collection of 52,000 volumes and 46 periodical subscriptions. Open only 30 hours per week, just 7% of the town's citizens were inscribed (Pallier 1996, 5–6). The libraries in Vitrolles and Marignane are scarcely larger. But the interventions confirmed the worst fears about how the FN would operate when given the opportunity to govern. Moreover, a disturbing trend appeared to be developing, as additional reports

of harassment of librarians and challenges to collections by the extreme right became more frequent (Pavlidès 1998). Many librarians and their allies now saw this as a call to arms.

Within days after the library inspector's report on Orange was released to the press, the headline in *Libération* on July 11, 1996 read, "National Front Censorship at the Library in Orange" [8]. *Le Monde* quickly followed on July 12, with Arlane Chemin reporting, "The National Front imposes its Choices at the Municipal Library of Orange." [9] The news crossed the Atlantic and on August 30, the *New York Times* ran an article by Craig Whitney, "The Mayor, Seeing Red, Purges the Reading List". The story was picked up in numerous international news media, surfacing again in the US in 2002 in an article in the *New Yorker* (Hilton 2002). News of actions in Marignane and Vitrolles were likewise widely reported in French and international media, and a documentary film on the fallout in Marignane, *Bibliothèques sous Influence* (Pittard 1999), aired nationally on France 3 Television.

Reports circulated widely in the library press and continue to attract the attention of the international library community. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions issued a resolution for the French government and French municipalities to support the principles of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, which states that collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship (63<sup>rd</sup> IFLA Council 1997, 390–91). More recently, the European Bureau of Library, Information and Documentation Associations (EBLIDA), expressing concern that "the pluralism, neutrality, and professionalism of public library services has been dangerously undermined in a variety of ways", succeeded in bringing the issue to the attention of the European Parliament (Defending Public Libraries 2002). Though these measures are largely symbolic, they nevertheless illustrate the potency of this issue and its far-ranging reverberation. It is important, however, not to lose perspective. A comparison of national reports in *Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* (2001) illustrates that censorship exists on a far more systematic and widespread scale in many other countries. The FN's affront to intellectual freedom in the land of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, however, created the proverbial shot heard round the world.

Confrontations with the FN initially caught librarians unaware, and consequently they mobilized to disseminate information about dealing with challenges to public library collections. The Association des Bibliothécaires Français (ABF) has no equivalent of an intellectual freedom committee, such as IFLA's Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) or the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom. However, a coalition of organizations including the ABF and its regional group PACA (Provence, Alpes, Côte d'Azur), the Fédération Française de Coopération entre Bibliothèques, and others, organized a workshop to assist librarians in defending their collections and services. The participants produced a web-based toolkit, available from the ABF website, that links to texts that reiterate the legal and philosophical basis of intellectual freedom in France, as well as outlining the legal rights and responsibilities of civil servants (such as librarians) regarding speaking out. Advice is also provided on record keeping, reporting problems through proper channels, and dealing with the media (Bibliothèques Face aux Pressions Politiques 2002). At the same time, numerous conferences, workshops, and colloquia raised professional consciousness and concerns about the ramifications of the FN's actions.

Useful though these measures may be, however, they may not be sufficiently effective weapons to deter the FN, or other partisan groups, from using the library as an ideological tool or from subverting the librarian. Thus, the idea of a law for libraries was put forward as a tangible and practical means of protecting the autonomy of the library and the librarian.

### *A law for libraries?*

In at least one instance, successful legal action was taken in response to the FN's actions. In Marignane, a group of citizens, supported by the regional library association, took the mayor's office to court for canceling subscriptions to *Libération*, *Nouvel Observateur*, and *La Marseillaise*. According to Luc Leroux in *Le Monde* on June 14, 1996, a judge in Marseille sided with the plaintiffs and ruled that the mayor's adjoint had no professional competence to make decisions regarding the library collection. Reinstatement of the subscriptions was ordered, on the basis that the

cancellation deprived users of access to an important current of thought.

This case notwithstanding, librarians have little in their legal arsenal. An anti-racist law (le loi du 1 juillet 1972, n° 72-546), and a law forbidding the negation of crimes against humanity (le loi du 13 juillet 1990, n° 90-615), appended to the 1881 law establishing freedom of expression, make the publication of certain ideas illegal. There is no legal means, however, of preventing interference of local politicians in library collections and services. Public libraries in France are largely financed by each municipality, but the state is responsible for providing technical control and for ensuring pluralism and freedom of access to the collections. Inspections are regularly conducted, but no legal penalties exist for failure to comply. Following the problems in Orange in 1996, the Minister of Culture Philippe Douste-Blazy, retaliated by withdrawing funds for the proposed expansion of the library – a strategy that arguably impacts the citizens of the town more than it impacts the officials. As described by Olivier Schmitt in *Le Monde* on July 23, 1996, he likewise resurrected the long-debated initiative of a law for libraries, adding a new spin by placing an emphasis on pluralism. With a legal means of ensuring pluralism of the collection, Douste-Blazy reasoned, similar interventions would be prevented.

The notion of pluralism is problematic, however, and proved to be a red flag for the FN. The ambiguity inherent in a concept that admits all currents of thought allows all sides to march under its banner. Librarians argue that the extreme right denies pluralism by excluding multicultural materials or political viewpoints with which they disagree, while the FN argues that librarians deny pluralism by excluding publications by the extreme right. As reported in *Le Monde* Feb. 19, 1997 (Le Front National Défie le Ministre 1997), FN spokesperson Jean-Yves Le Gallou declared, “If a law on pluralism in libraries is passed, FN officials will use it before the courts to force libraries to accept materials that are currently excluded.” [10] The succeeding Minister of Culture, Catherine Trautmann, remained sympathetic to a law, hoping it would “give librarians the means to oppose scandalous decisions regarding acquisitions”, [11] according to an article in *Le Monde* on Sept 11, 1997 (M<sup>me</sup> Trautmann Annonce une Loi

1997). Ultimately, the emphasis on pluralism was dropped, but passage of a library law stalled nonetheless.

Library laws have been adopted in other European countries and in the UK, but France has thus far defied passage of a similar law. Debated long before problems with the extreme right, the notion has the support of the professional association, but is not universally endorsed. In the view of the ABE, a law would articulate the mission of the public library, and define the responsibilities of the librarian and the limits of external control (Belayche 2000). Paradoxically, opponents are concerned about potential risks to local autonomy and control (Santantonios 1996). In any case, passage has languished for numerous reasons, including lack of political support, partisan politics, and the complex ramifications of political decentralization in France. It remains to be seen whether such legislation will be passed, and whether it will provide solution its supporters envision.

### *Acquisitions policies, censorship, and intellectual freedom*

For their part, the National Front reacted sharply and defensively to the avalanche of criticism, claiming to be the victim of systematic discrimination by libraries and insisting that its actions were merely intended to “rebalance” collections. As noted by Craig Whitney in the *New York Times* on August 30, 1996, Mayor Bompard justified his actions in Orange by arguing, “All French libraries are controlled by the left and the extreme left. I want all political currents to be represented unless a book is immoral or outlawed”. The FN issued a report of their own, criticizing public library collections for their left-wing tendencies and lack of pluralism in political thought. Their report charges that libraries are guilty of censorship and of systematic disregard for the principles of pluralism by developing collections sympathetic to the left and systematically excluding the voice of opposition political groups, namely the extreme right (Front National, Conseil Régional d’Ile de France, 1996). Thus, the FN guilefully claims that they are simply applying democratic principles to library collections because librarians fail to do so. The report itself contains serious logical and methodological errors in its attempt to

examine library holdings for political and social content. Mainstream leftist materials, such as the newspaper *Libération*, are held out as examples of sympathy to the extreme left, and they argue that no counterbalance is available to represent the extreme right. In fact, the levels of “extremism” are nowhere equivalent. Incorrectly executed subject searches lead to the false conclusion that European fairy tales are underrepresented. Despite methodological errors, however, the report raises important questions about the nature of political pluralism in public library collections. Thus in addition to pursuing offensive strategies to safeguard libraries from political control, librarians were forced to examine their practices and defend their professional role in developing library collections.

In the wake of the FN’s charges, professional attention focused on addressing weaknesses in collection development. According to Bertrand Calenge, French librarians have traditionally been reluctant to spend time on formal acquisitions policy statements and collection assessment. Indeed, many librarians prefer to take a more intellectual than a technical approach to collection development (Calenge 1999, 1–32). The ABF likewise encouraged a reflection on selection principles and practices to ensure that librarians are responsive to community needs and can justify choices and rejections. An ABF commission on acquisitions subsequently analyzed best practices and established a set of guidelines for formalizing policies and procedures (Acquisitions et Bibliothèques 2000). Work on collection development issues, including collection development plans, collection assessment, and professional development, continues through the efforts of a research group POLDOC, established in 1999 at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Sciences de l’Information et des Bibliothèques (POLDOC 2003).

### *Reexamination of principles*

In reviewing the professional literature of this period, one might argue that the National Front in fact provoked a (re)examination and defense of the very principles on which libraries and librarianship are based. Public libraries in France are both blessed and cursed by an historical tradition in which libraries were established as repositories for the national patrimony and for the

practice of erudite scholarship (hence the title “conservateur” to designate the highest professional level of librarian). These rarified collections and clientele have historically militated against a tradition of open access to a wide variety of information for the average citizen. [12] Though the idea of the library as place for the public exercise of reason was eloquently articulated by Gabriel Naudé as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, public libraries did not flourish as community information centers until relatively recently. In the early 1990s, a national charter for libraries established the library as a “public service necessary to the exercise of democracy” [13] The charter likewise asserts that the collections must be open to all, responsive to the interests of all members of the community, and represent the full range of knowledge and currents of opinion (Conseil Supérieur des Bibliothèques 1992). The challenges posed by the FN to the library’s mission inspired a professional reflection on the contribution of libraries to democracy in providing free access to information, guaranteeing equality of access to all citizens, and contributing to the development of an informed citizenry (Bibliothèques et Citoyenneté 1997).

The FN’s actions also ushered in a flurry of professional discourse and debate on censorship and intellectual freedom, as librarians struggled with the paradox of denouncing the FN’s ideological censorship, while justifying the exclusion of propagandistic or extremist materials. Summarizing discussion at a colloquium on acquisitions policies and practices in public libraries, Martine Poulain asks the pivotal question, “But is it necessary, in the name of pluralism, if not democracy ... to accept all publications in the library, including those repugnant to us, which are contrary to the very principles on which a public library was constituted?” [14] (Poulain 1997, 60–61). Bearing in mind Voltaire’s eloquent defense of intellectual freedom (“I don’t agree with you but I will defend to death your right to say it”), she points out that librarians must also defend the public library as an institution that applies values and principles to developing its collections. Jean-Luc Gautier-Gentès emphasizes the cultural mission of public libraries, and questions whether overtly political materials, such as party literature, biographies, etc., belong in these collections. If they were to be acquired, however, it is critical that the librarian open the collection to

all ideologies (Gautier-Gentès 1998). According to principles set forth by the ABF's acquisitions commission, libraries also have the responsibility to contribute to social cohesion, and can appeal to constitutional values in refusing materials that openly exclude or disfavor segments of the population. By the same token, librarians must not silence opposing voices by deliberately rejecting materials that promote controversial ideas. As professionals grounded in respect for democratic ideals and trained in selection practices, however, librarians have a responsibility to differentiate between propaganda and reasoned argument while representing all currents of thought (Acquisitions et Bibliothèques 2000, 125).

### *Danger of conformity*

The question of political pluralism in collections offers rich food for thought. In an insightful essay on extremist literature, Gautier-Gentès challenges librarians to reflect on whether librarians are guilty of implicit self-censorship, and whether libraries have indeed become "conformothèques" as charged by the FN: spaces where centrist conformity reigns and extremisms have been excluded (Gautier-Gentès 2000). He theorizes that because librarians are committed to democracy, they may view extremist literature from both ends of the political spectrum as potentially threatening to the democratic principles they cherish. Paradoxically then, freedom of expression is denied to those who would suppress that very freedom. In arguing against extremist literature in libraries, he cites concern about the library's implied support for these viewpoints, and complicity in promoting potentially inflammatory propaganda. The literature often attacks vulnerable members of the community, and undermines librarians in their struggle against repression. In support of extremist literature, however, he argues that its availability provides access for research purposes for those who seek to refute it. The materials are often damaging enough in themselves to discredit their authors, so their potency should not be overestimated. Moreover, it works to the disadvantage of democracy to silence controversial viewpoints, and provides justification for the excluded group to claim victimization. (Stifling dangerous notions can prove counterproductive, as Kechichian and Van Ren-

terghem illustrate in their article in *Le Monde* on March 17 1997, about the destruction of the FN's booth at the Paris Book Fair.)

Gautier-Gentès maintains that libraries have a responsibility to operate within the boundaries of the social consensus that enables society to function, but they must not establish an intellectual consensus in which only certain ideas are represented. He argues for distinguishing between excluding outright expressions of hatred (hate speech) and censoring extremist thought. Though his recommendation that libraries purchase critical editions of controversial works, such as *Mein Kampf*, may be unrealistic given the limited number of such titles available, he ultimately strives for achieving a balance between providing citizens with access to all currents of thought and preserving the public library's social contract. He also views cooperative collection development and resource sharing as important strategies in solving this dilemma. Thus individual libraries need not collect materials outside the scope of their acquisitions policy, but can rely on libraries with a more extensive mission and collection to acquire controversial material.

In reviewing the reactions of the profession, from revisiting the mission of the public library to reflecting on censorship and collection development, the actions of the National Front clearly had an impact. By instigating an examination of basic principles and fomenting intellectual debate, they arguably unified and strengthened the library profession – and highlighted the philosophical questions that librarians are uniquely poised to tackle.

### *Current status, summary, and conclusions*

The presence of the FN in the presidential elections of 2002 again mobilized many librarians. The Biblio-fr listserv (biblio-fr@cru.fr 2002) was ablaze with postings urging its constituents to voice their political opposition (though some questioned whether this political role is appropriate for the profession). The ABF developed a Web site which pulls together mobilization efforts within the profession, including advocacy information, a bibliography, and links to statements from a large number of library organizations which formally registered their opposition to the FN (Association des Bibliothécaires Français 2002).

Gilles Eboli observes, however, that despite the optimism that followed the professional mobilization and agitation in the late 1990s, the situation hasn't actually improved. The public libraries in the FN towns suffered catastrophic effects that the profession was unable to mitigate, including budget cuts of 48% in Orange, a 39% drop in inscriptions in Vitrolles, [15] and a significant reduction in professional staff in Marignane. He urges sustained vigilance and continued pressure for adoption of a charter for librarians to define professional responsibilities and safeguard access to information (Eboli 2002).

On the other hand, the professional landscape has perceptibly altered. During the late 1990s, media attention brought the issue of political control of libraries to national attention. Librarians organized to raise consciousness of library values and develop strategies for reacting to political pressure. When the FN challenged the status quo of library acquisitions by alleging bias, librarians were roused to debate issues of censorship, intellectual freedom, and the meaning of pluralism in collections. These important questions ultimately get to the heart of librarianship: an understanding of the principles and practices of developing and managing a pluralistic collection, safeguarding access to information, and serving users without discrimination. Following the example of many of their international colleagues, the ABF codified a professional code of ethics in March 2003, which establishes a set of principles for providing services and collections. Among other principles, it specifically calls upon librarians to develop collections that enable citizens to better understand public issues, and to resist influence from political, religious, union, or social pressure groups (Association des Bibliothécaires Français 2003).

Are these largely symbolic gestures sufficient to confront a movement that undermines democratic values? In an article in *Le Monde* on July 27, 1997, former French Secretary of State Jean Gatel expresses the futility of confronting the National Front with the tools of reason and logic since their leaders operate in the arena of personal attacks, defamation, and even fistfights. In his view, as echoed by others, the most effective response is to secure the social and economic conditions that will lead to the extreme right's political defeat. Librarians will undoubtedly join in that

lengthy and difficult struggle. At the same time, librarians must continue to ensure that their collections, services, and public engagement reflect democratic ideals, and that libraries represent a haven for "the public exercise of reason."

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### Notes

1. "[La bibliothèque] est le lieu privilégié où peut s'exercer une influence idéologique en profondeur; ne sous-estimons pas cet outil de reconquête des esprits!"
2. See, for example, Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys. 1998. *The Politics of Racism in France*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
3. "Il est temps de donner un bon coup de balai aussi bien dans les bibliothèques que dans les différents rouages du pouvoir."
4. For additional reading, see Peter Davies. 1999. *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse, and Power*. London: Routledge.
5. For additional details, see Arnaud Miguet. 2002. The French Elections of 2002: After the Earthquake, the Deluge. *West European Politics* 25: 207–19.
6. "L'ostracisme contre les livres d'extrême droite"
7. "On nous a toujours regardé comme des pestiférés. Il est temps que nous ayons le droit à la parole."
8. "Censure FN à la bibliothèque d'Orange"
9. "Le Front National impose ses choix à la Bibliothèque Municipale d'Orange"
10. "Si une loi sur le pluralisme dans les bibliothèques était votée, le parti l'utiliseraient devant les tribunaux pour faire entrer dans les bibliothèques les auteurs et les journaux qui en sont aujourd'hui exclus."
11. "Donner aux bibliothécaires les moyens de s'opposer à des décisions scandaleuses en matière d'acquisition."
12. For additional reading, see Histoire des Bibliothèques Françaises. 1989. Paris: Cercle de la Librairie/Promodis. v. 3–4.
13. "[La Bibliothèque est] un service public nécessaire à l'exercice de la démocratie"
14. "Mais faut-il, au nom du pluralisme, voire au nom de la démocratie ... accepter toutes les publications dans la bibliothèque, y compris celles qui nous répugnent, qui sont contraires aux principes

mêmes sur lesquels s'est constituée la bibliothèque publique?"

15. The FN lost the election in Vitrolles in 2002, but the library continues to suffer the effects.

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