

French textbooks

Class struggle

PARIS

Hostility to free markets starts at school

BOTH relief and tears will greet the results of France's school-leaving *baccalauréat* exam on July 5th. With breathtaking efficiency, the entire country's exam papers are corrected and marked within just two weeks. Founded in 1808 by Napoleon, the *bac* is an entry ticket to university as well as a yearly national ritual, which opens with a gruelling compulsory four-hour philosophy general paper that even scientists have to sit. This year the papers seem particularly revealing of how French youngsters are taught to view the world.

"What do we owe to the state?" was one essay option in the philosophy exam. In the economics and social science paper, pupils were asked to comment on a wealth-distribution table, showing that 10% of French households owned 48% of the country's wealth, and then told to "demonstrate that social conflict can be a factor behind social cohesion". We still have the mentality of the class struggle, says Nicolas Lecaussin, of the Institute of Fiscal and Economic Research (IREF), a think-tank, and author of a report on economics textbooks.

France excels at producing top-rate academic economists. But high-school teaching of economics is uneven. The IREF study last year showed that, in one tome's 382 pages, only 18 were devoted to business. "Entrepreneurs and business leaders are almost absent," noted the

report, and "globalisation and free trade are treated with distrust."

The national syllabus has been somewhat revised since 2011. Basic economic concepts, including supply and demand, have been reinforced. Economics and sociology, the two component parts of the combined paper, have been partly separated. The portrayal of companies has become more neutral. With government backing, Béatrice Couairon of the Institute of Enterprise, a think-tank, runs a programme to bring together business leaders and lycée economics teachers in order, she says, "to close the gap".

Yet the curriculum remains heavily tilted towards social conflict. The analysis of social structure starts with Marx. One textbook's subheadings move depressingly from "More and more suicides at work", to "More and more insecure jobs". In another textbook, a chapter on "social justice" asks: "Do high revenues threaten fairness?", and illustrates it with a 19th-century engraving of a bourgeois couple and a photo of a modern-day French demonstrator with a placard reading "Tax the rich".

Little wonder, perhaps, that the French are consistently both champion pessimists and hostile to free markets. In 2012, according to a Globescan poll, only 4% of the French agreed that free-market capitalism works well, next to 27% of Americans and 22% of the Chinese.

tent. The centrist Union for Progress and Democracy (UPYD), founded by Rosa Díez, a former Socialist, is settling in as the new third party, making her a potential king-maker at the next general election. Ms Díez blames the two big parties for wrecking the economy by pumping up a property bubble through their joint control of planning laws, regulators, the central bank and reckless savings banks. She bashes nationalists in Catalonia and her native Basque country. She seeks radical internal reform, re-centralising control over health and education and taking privileges away from Basques, Catalans and Navarrans by putting all regions on an equal footing. And, like Britain's Liberal Democrats, she wants electoral reform to favour her own party.

Ms Díez refuses to rule out future deals with any party except those with ties to ETA, the Basque terrorist group. But she insists on a constitutional overhaul and wants the next parliament to bring it about. "A self-confident democracy revises its laws on the basis of their conse-

quences," she says. Ms Díez claims UPYD, which has just five deputies, has already pushed political debate towards previously taboo topics such as constitutional reform or reversing devolution.

The other beneficiary of discontent is United Left (IU), a communist-led coalition that has shown surprising flexibility in regional governments. It helped a minority PP government snatch power from the Socialists in Extremadura. But it backed the Socialists in Asturias and is in a coalition with them in Andalusia, one of the largest regions. José Luis Centella, an IU deputy, says these regional deals cannot be extrapolated to national politics.

With future votes spread so widely, dealmaking will decide elections. The Socialists have the advantage. They can ally with IU, UPYD as well as Catalan or Basque nationalists. They could even bring several parties together. Perhaps, given the number of ingredients it may need, Spain's next government will look like the popular national dish: a paella coalition. ■



Bulgarian protests

Noresharski!
Noligarchy!

SOFIA

The new government looks unlikely to last long

EVERY day for nearly three weeks, tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets of Sofia, Varna, Burgas and other Bulgarian cities. In Sofia, the capital, the demonstrators meet at 6.30pm in Independence Square and then make their way past the parliament, the Eagles' Bridge and the National Palace of Culture. They call for more transparency, less corruption, an effective fight against organised crime and an end to the rule of local oligarchs.

The protests are different from previous episodes of civil unrest since the end of communism, which have mostly featured the poor protesting about utility bills or the minimum wage. Recent marches have drawn in members of the young, educated middle class who use Facebook and Twitter and turn up with strollers and bicycles. A group of about 60 intellectuals, lawyers, human-rights activists and journalists joined in by posting an online "charter for disbanding the plutocratic model of the Bulgarian state". Tihomir Bezlov of the Centre for the Study of Democracy in Sofia says that the atmosphere reminds him of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia more than 20 years ago.

The demonstrations began as a response to the nomination of Delyan Peevski, a 32-year-old media mogul, as head of the powerful national security agency. Mr Peevski had been sacked from a previous Socialist-led government and prosecuted