

# Sarkozy stigmatises immigrants and glorifies the French nation

**Antoine Lerougetel****15 March 2007**

In a TV interview last Thursday and at a rally before 10,000 supporters in Caen in Normandy the following Friday, Nicolas Sarkozy, presidential candidate for the ruling Gaullist UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), announced his intention, if elected, to set up a new ministry of immigration and national identity and to further strengthen immigration restrictions.

Sarkozy wants to create a social and ideological base whereby any action by workers to defend their rights and living standards would be counted as unpatriotic and even treasonable.

He scapegoats immigrants and denies their human rights: “A person who enters France illegally, a person who makes no attempt to integrate, that person should not expect to have the same rights as a French person.... I want undocumented immigrants to be excluded from the legal right to be housed. I want an immigrant who is *legally* resident not to be able to bring his family over, unless, prior to entering our territory, that family has learnt to speak French and we are sure that the income from his work enables him to look after it and house it decently” (emphasis added). He justifies this by the claim: “I want to protect France and its values.”

The message—that immigrants represent a danger to the French way of life and culture, and that an increased hounding of them is justified—has been enthusiastically welcomed by neo-fascist presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. He commented that Sarkozy was “whoring for votes on the National Front’s patch,” but defended him from his critics, saying that to refuse “to associate immigration and national identity” is to deny that “immigration can harm the national identity.”

The anti-racist organisation MRAP (Movement against Racism and for Friendship between Peoples) commented that Sarkozy “obviously did not choose these terms by chance, but in associating these terms, he unleashes racist speech and ideology, he gravely threatens national

cohesion, he makes a social choice, that of the rejection of the other, in a logic of incendiary division.”

After a period, particularly on the occasion of his acceptance speech for the party nomination on January 14, of attempting to humanise his abrasive and provocative image in order to offset his Socialist Party (PS) opponent Ségolène Royal’s close challenge to his lead in the opinion polls, Sarkozy has now made a sharp turn to the right for several reasons.

Writing in the conservative daily *Le Figaro*, Bruno Jeudy notes: “Convinced that the presidential elections are going to be decided on the right, Nicolas Sarkozy is pre-empting the issue of ‘national identity.’ ” He adds that “Sarkozy thus aims to harden his right flank at a time when Bayrou is making inroads into the moderates among Sarkozy’s electorate.”

François Bayrou, presidential candidate for the right centrist UDF (Union for French Democracy, the party of former president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing), under conditions where there is no clear alternative to the right-wing agenda of the PS and UMP contenders, has made a breakthrough in the opinions polls, where Bayrou, Sarkozy and Royal are now bunched around 25 percent. A few weeks ago, Bayrou was barely above 6 percent. Some polls indicate that, in a run-off against either Royal or Sarkozy, Bayrou would win. Bayrou pledges, if elected, to form some kind of coalition national government of harmony between left and right.

Sarkozy rejects this for a clear right-wing agenda: “The election campaign must have a purpose. Why do I make precise pledges to the French people? Because I want the French people to make a clear choice.” He is here serving notice of his determination to carry through harsh attacks on democratic rights and severe reductions in social services.

Sarkozy’s camp, according to Bruno Jeudy, also does not rule out the Le Pen threat—their candidate being beaten

in the first round by Le Pen, as happened in 2002 with the Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin. *Le Figaro* points out that the well-known pollster Laurent Solly considers that, though Le Pen has remained for some time around 14 percent of polled voting intentions, he “is at 31 percent approval rating (up by 6 percent) in the *Paris-Match* barometer, and the rate of certainty of his voters is close to 80 percent.” It is thought that his real score would be some three to four percentage points higher than in the opinion polls, as it turned out on April 21, 2002.

Beyond immediate electoral tactics, there are more fundamental reasons for Sarkozy’s shift to the right. Under conditions of growing friction between EU states and sharp differences between Europe and the United States over access to energy resources and the military interventions in the Middle East, Sarkozy wants to gather the social and political forces to advance French imperialism’s foreign policy in a more aggressive way.

At his February 28 press conference, he outlined an aggressive foreign policy, involving a strengthening of France’s military presence in the world. This requires a chauvinist brainwashing in pursuit of the “national interest.” Hence, his appeal with fervent nationalist outpourings to the most backward elements of French society, many of whom have attachments to the armed forces or the former colonies.

He declares in tones with an ominously totalitarian ring: “When it comes to France, there can be no division into camps.”

Speaking of the Airbus restructuring plan Power 8, he asserts in his TV interview, “I know how the Germans defend their interests.” Airbus must be “run as an enterprise, an industry.” He accuses the German company Daimler-Benz, which is a major private stakeholder in Airbus, of irresponsible greed: it “asks for dividends to remunerate its capital in a company which is sacking 10,000 people; that I cannot accept.”

The airbus restructuring is one part of a general restructuring of the French economy affecting firms such as Michelin, Renault and PSA Citroën-Peugeot.

The trade unions at Airbus, notably FO (Workers Power), are following Sarkozy’s nationalist line. They refuse to mobilise Airbus worker’ European-wide against the plan of the management and present the dispute as a conflict between France and Germany. Thus, they have called off a demonstration against Power 8 of workers from all the European plants scheduled for March 16.

Sarkozy’s speech at Caen on Friday took the form of an incantation punctuated by roars of applause where the

words “France” and “French” were repeated 200 times or more in a script of nine pages.

Through empty rhetorical devices and phoney history, he sought to amalgamate the historical class struggles in France into the myth of a “France, one and indivisible.” He sought to obscure the sharp class divide in French society with tedious phrases invoking an abstract “national identity”: “France is a miracle.... It is France’s miracle to combine such a strong identity with such a great aspiration to universalism...a mysterious interweaving...a mysterious bond.... The Republic has accomplished the ancient dream of the kings. It has made us a nation one and indivisible.”

Sarkozy insisted that France suffers not from a social crisis but rather “a moral crisis” and that “denigrating the nation is at the heart of that crisis.” Defending his plan to create the ministry of immigration and national identity, in *Le Figaro* March 11 he said, “It is because immigration policy is the identity of France in 30 years’ time.”

He reserved for immigrants lynch-mob characterisations: “The person who does not wish to recognise that women are the equals of men, the man who wants to shut away his wife, force his daughter to wear a veil, to undergo excision, or to endure a forced marriage, he has no business in France.” At the same time, he claimed to be the inheritor of France’s fighters for progress from the Enlightenment to the Resistance against the Nazis.

Sarkozy’s invocation of nationalism goes along with his strivings to create a battering ram against youth and workers who resist his free-market, anti-welfare state programme.

Taken with the huge strengthening of police powers through a series of laws sponsored by Sarkozy and the UMP government since 2002, and a weakening of legal labour protection and civil rights, all of which have gone through with little or no opposition from the trade unions and the left parties, despite massive sporadic protests, his stated intentions pose a very serious threat to the mass of the population. They clear the ground for the sweeping away of social gains and democratic rights won in more than two centuries of struggle.



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