

Sarkozy's right-wing policies bolster French neo-fascist

Anthony Torres
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The statements by Marine Le Pen—daughter and heir apparent of Jean-Marie Le Pen as leader of the neo-fascist National Front (FN)—have aroused a renewal of media interest in the FN and the influence of the neo-fascists in French politics.

Marine Le Pen's statements have attracted many comments from bourgeois parties. On December 10, during a meeting in Lyon, Marine Le Pen launched a racist attack against Muslims who, for lack of mosques in order to pray indoors, pray in the street. Marine Le Pen compared "Muslim prayers in the streets to the [second World War] German military occupation of France."

She also made several criticisms of the euro currency—affected by several financial crises during 2010—declaring that it would be better for France to abandon the European single currency.

The main political parties replied to Le Pen's criticisms by attempting to accommodate them or by making secondary criticisms, which did not refute the substance of what she said.

The national spokesman for the Socialist Party, Benoît Hamon, did not adopt a fundamentally different position from that of Le Pen on Muslims praying in the streets. As regards this, he estimated that: "these are situations which cannot be tolerated much longer, we have a tense situation with neighbours and we have to find solutions."

On December 14, the Europe 1 Internet site wrote: "Questioned about the comments of Jean-François Copé, leader of the right-wing ruling party the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), who had asserted: 'Marine Le Pen, she's like her father,' she replied, 'Jean-François Copé, as it happens, wants to re-launch the debate on national identity. He's my best ally, taking into account the fact that the UMP has nothing to say on this subject. I think Jean-François Copé wants, in fact, the defeat of Sarkozy in 2012 [presidential election]', she said."

Marine Le Pen now tries to present herself as the defender of secularism and republican values. According to the magazine *Marianne*, Marine Le Pen stated: "I am the one who is the true defender of the French Republic!" Confronted with the reactions of Martine Aubrey (Socialist Party leader) and Jean François Copé, she added: "By expressing themselves in this way, the UMP/Socialist Party coalition has shown that the response to the attack on secularism will not come from their quarter."

Marine Le Pen's response, by presenting herself as the defender of secularism and the republic, breaks with the traditional rhetoric of 20th century fascists. The latter denounced the French Republic as "the whore"—notably before its capitulation to the Nazis in 1940—and were often motivated by Catholic fundamentalism.

This turnaround of political vocabulary shows to what extent the bourgeois parties have already given a politically reactionary content to the slogans of "secularism" and "the Republic".

In a *Le monde* article of December 15 entitled "Marine Le Pen's supporters want to make secularism an issue for the 2012 presidential election", Abel Mestre wrote: "The theme of secularism which allows, by a rhetorical wordplay, the justification of violent attacks against Islam and Muslims is not new with Marine Le Pen. At the end of 2009, on the occasion of the debate on national identity and the Swiss vote to ban minarets, Mme. Le Pen already presented herself as 'one of the last defenders of secularism'".

In fact, Marine Le Pen did not invent the "rhetorical wordplay" consisting of attacks on Muslims under the false cover of secularism. It is an old manoeuvre of French governments, used recently by the conservative presidents Jacques Chirac and then Nicolas Sarkozy—with the aid of the Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party (PCF), and of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA).

It is therefore the right-wing politics of the whole of the French political establishment, including the misnamed “left” milieu, which has laid the ground for Marine Le Pen’s political offensive.

At the time of the 2002 presidential elections, Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen faced each other in a run-off in the second round of the election. Chirac had been supported by the whole of the French political establishment, including “the far left”, among which was the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) the forerunner of the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party). The role of these tendencies was to spread the illusion that Chirac would be “different” and “more republican” than Le Pen.

In 2003-04 the Chirac government enacted racist and anti-Muslim laws which banned the wearing of the Muslim veil (head scarf) in schools under the pretext of defending “secularism”. Nicolas Sarkozy, then minister of the interior, attacked youth from the most oppressed layers of the working class. After his election as president, Sarkozy accelerated his austerity measures in 2009 and launched a right-wing nationalist debate on national identity and a law banning the burqa.

The PS and PCF among others participated in the parliamentary commission established to draw up the anti-burqa law. The NPA, although not having officially supported the law, was in agreement with the values expressed in the state’s campaign; it proposed no class perspective against the nationalist campaign of the established parties. Furthermore, the NPA formed electoral alliances for the regional elections of March 2010 with the parties having participated in the elaboration of the anti-burqa law.

While declaring itself hostile to an anti-burqa law, the NPA implied that it had no objection in principle to the banning of the burqa, and in May 2009, *Le Parisien* asked the party’s spokesman Olivier Besancenot if “a fine of €150 to punish the wearing of the burqa in a public space” was “fair”. Besancenot had answered: “the problem is not the fine, but the use made of it by the politicians. The burqa oppresses women, but any law would be inefficient and unfair.”

The betrayal of the workers movement against the pensions reform last autumn by the trade unions and the ex- left parties confirmed that there would be no resistance on their part against Sarkozy’s austerity policies. This also signified that there would be no effective resistance to his racist and anti-Islamic offensive. After the defeat inflicted on the workers’ strikes, the politicians have returned to racist themes to

poison the political atmosphere.

The fact that Marine Le Pen can campaign against the euro currency underlines to what extent the austerity policies carried out throughout Europe have weakened the monetary and social basis of the European bourgeoisie. The French bourgeoisie replies by advocating far right nationalism, which currently ends up promoting the National Front.

This confirms the correctness of the principled opposition of the WSWs to the anti-veil and anti-burqa campaigns, and more widely to the campaigns against immigrants under the cover of “republican values”. These campaigns have served to pave the way for the neo-fascists.

In its article headlined “The French New Anti-Capitalist Party and the anti-burqa campaign ” the WSWs stated: French President Nicolas Sarkozy has announced a series of deeply anti-democratic measures, including the persecution and deportation of Roma, the prosecution of the parents of young ‘offenders,’ and a proposed law enabling to government to strip immigrants of their French nationality.

“These policies underscore the significance of the campaign launched by Sarkozy last year to ban the burqa. This racist anti-Muslim drive, initiated with the approval of the Socialist Party (PS) and the French Communist Party (PCF), set in motion a violent turn by the government against religious liberties and the rule of law.”

As regards the NPA, which used the pretext of not wanting to enter into the debate on national identity, the WSWs wrote: “This absurd declaration says much about the NPA, a party that is indifferent to workers’ democratic rights. Having remarked that the state was encouraging racism—a dangerous political turn to the right, whose extent has since revealed itself—the NPA announced that it would not intervene against the campaign, which it trivialized as ‘a masquerade.’”



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