French media gives glowing coverage of new National Front leader

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4 February 2011

Marine Le Pen, daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen—the founder of the far right National Front (FN)— was elected president of the party on January 16, receiving two thirds of the votes of the membership. This election and the investiture speech have been the object of media coverage unsurpassed for the French far right, notably with the speech broadcast live by news channels.

The space given to the FN in the main French mass media began to increase after the defeat of the strike movement of October 2010 against pension reform. This was betrayed by the trade unions and parties of the "left", which negotiated the reform with President Nicolas Sarkozy.

The perspective of possible agreements with Sarkozy's UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) party would have convinced the majority of FN members to favour the "young" Marine Le Pen above her rival Bruno Gollnisch. This hope is shared by a part of the "republican" right. After the March 2010 regional elections, Thierry Mariani, UMP deputy for the Vaucluse, declared voters supporting the right were "always attentive to issues such as immigration, law-and-order and patriotism". According to a recent opinion poll, 40 per cent of UMP supporters would be favourable to an alliance with the FN.

The programme of FN remains as chauvinistic and violent as before. In a chat with *Le Monde,* Marine Le Pen supported the recent law controlling the freedom of the press in Hungary and "national preference" in the provision of social services. The latter refers to barring immigrants from receiving social welfare benefits. She refused to distance herself from the well-known anti-Semitism of her father—who has frequently denied that the Jews were the victims of a genocide during the Second World War—claiming she had no reason to believe her father was an anti-Semite.

But Marine Le Pen has been able to exploit a general movement to the right of the entire French political class to present a rejuvenated image, which the mass media and bourgeois politicians buttress. Ségolène Royal, ex-PS candidate in the presidential election of 2007, explains, with a hint of respect, that Marine Le Pen "has eliminated all the caricature features of her father.... She is a more dangerous, more credible candidate...in her persuasiveness".

Marine Le Pen has also tried to associate herself with the nationalist populism of Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Party (PG), allied with the French Communist Party (PCF) in the Left Front. She commented, "Mr. Mélenchon, whom I remind people was in the Socialist Party for 21 years, only recently discovered the ravages of globalisation. I am very pleased about this tardy flash of lucidity. We can, therefore, on a certain number of subjects, share our views.…"

A recent opinion poll by the French Institute of Public Opinion predicts Marine Le Pen's score in the next presidential election in 2012 at 16.5 percent. This could enable her to make the second round, as did her father in 2002, causing a political crisis and mass demonstrations. This result is nevertheless lower than the combined far-right vote in 2002, which was 16.86 per cent for Jean-Marie Le Pen and 2.34 per cent for Bruno Mégret—a total of 19.2 per cent.

The increase of anticipated votes for the FN does not mean there is real popular support for her political programme. The turn to the right by the French political class as a whole has created the poisonous political atmosphere in which Marine Le Pen can try to rejuvenate neo-fascism.

What the French commentators call the "spectre of April 21st, 2002" is a means of hiding an indisputable

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fact: the presence of the FN in the second round of the 2002 election was not simply the result of the multiplicity of candidates (there were 15). It was the result of popular disillusionment with the PS-PCF-Green government led by Lionel Jospin. In his five years of power, Jospin enacted free market reforms and the privatisation of public services. The PS president also declared he "could do nothing" to firms carrying out mass layoffs despite making record profits. Jospin also sent French troops to participate in the invasion of Afghanistan begun in 2001.

In trying to channel social discontent by encouraging the rise of the FN, the mass media is repeating a strategy invented by the PS during the presidency of François Mitterrand. He had asked public television to give greater coverage to Jean-Marie Le Pen, allegedly to split the right. At the time, Mitterrand was starting to liquidate large sections of basic industry—mining, steel and motor cars— notably in the north and east. The FN, founded in 1973, began to grow in this period, as it exploited the anger against the PS and betrayals of the trade unions.

Marine Le Pen's prospects have improved as we enter the fourth year of a worldwide economic crisis triggered by the bankruptcies on Wall Street in 2008. Since then, the European governments—of the right in Germany and in France, or of social democrats in Spain and Greece—have imposed brutal austerity measures on behalf of the world bankers.

The resistance of workers has been betrayed and sabotaged by forces claiming to be "left," including the trade unions and their political backers from the PCF and New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA). All of them insist the only possible perspective is to negotiate reforms with governments and the banks.

In France, the unions negotiated a plan for the motor industry, which produced a wave of relocations and plant closures. They prepared a pension reform, against which they cynically organised one-day strikes—aiming not at overturning the government, but channelling discontent against the very government with whom they negotiated reforms.

When the workers reacted with protracted strikes, notably the port and oil-industry strikes of October 2010, the unions did nothing to oppose their repression by the police. They insisted that any resistance could only be "symbolic".

The repression of popular demands and the class struggle inevitably produces reactionary consequences. Infuriated by the social depredations carried out by the capitalist class, the more backward layers of the population are attracted by reactionary and nationalist policies. In this, they are encouraged by the nationalist and chauvinistic traditions conveyed by political forces such as the PCF and PS.

Throughout the last decade, the PS and its political allies have refused to distance themselves from the law-and-order rhetoric used by Sarkozy to prepare the 2007 election campaign. On the contrary, Royal was proposing to send young offenders to camps run by the army.

Beginning in the summer of 2009, Sarkozy worked with the PS and PCF to prepare a law forbidding the burqa, a project launched by PCF deputy André Gérin. Sarkozy's brutal campaign against the Roma last summer was a continuation of this, serving as a justification for the strengthening the repressive apparatus in the defence of "republican" values

The growing convergence between neo-fascism and the parties of the official French "left"—on the questions of national chauvinism, militarism and hostility to basic democratic rights—underlines the central importance of proletarian internationalism.

As the WSWS stated (see "The Greek debt crisis signals a new stage in class conflict"), "The most urgent task confronting the working class—in Greece, in Europe and throughout the world—is the building of a new revolutionary political party, based on the principles of international socialism. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political organisation that seeks to organise and unify the working class in the struggle against capitalist exploitation, poverty and war."

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