

# May Day marches in France held amid rising neo-fascist influence

Our reporters  
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May Day marches in France attracted falling support in France in 2011, with 120,000 people marching around the country compared to 350,000 last year, according to the CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union.

This was a vote of no confidence by workers on the ex-”left” parties and the unions, especially after their isolation and betrayal of strikes against President Nicolas Sarkozy’s pension cuts last October.

Above all, however, the marches were marked by the rising political influence of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), both in opinion polls and particularly among the personnel of the union bureaucracy and ex-”left” parties. Marine Le Pen—the new FN leader and daughter of former FN head Jean-Marie Le Pen—led her first May Day FN rally in front of Joan of Arc’s statue on Pyramid Square in Paris, to great media fanfare. The FN reported that 20,000 people attended, while police said that 3,600 people were present at the neo-fascist rally.

An IFOP poll of April 26 found that 36 percent of industrial workers would vote for the FN candidate in 2012—more than twice that of the Socialist Party (PS) at 17 percent, and of Sarkozy at 15 percent. Recent local elections in March confirmed the mass disaffection with the established political parties, when abstentions rose to 54 percent. The FN increased its share of the vote to 15 percent.

The fascist FN is being confirmed in opinion polls as being likely to eliminate right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy in the first round of voting in the 2012 presidential election. This scenario would leave the FN candidate Marine Le Pen in a second-round run-off against the likely Socialist Party (PS) candidate Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK), the current head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Sarkozy became president in 2007 by attracting 40 percent of the FN vote with his right-wing populist propaganda of promising more purchasing power through “work more to earn more” (which was to leave overtime untaxed) and anti-immigrant policies. After imposing repeated social cuts on the working class, and with unemployment and underemployment reaching 5 million, Sarkozy’s poll rating now stands at 28 percent. This is the lowest of any president in France since the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

At the May Day rally, CGT General Secretary Bernard Thibault’s answer to the FN’s influence was to explain the FN’s opposing French workers to immigrant workers, which “offers a division in favour of the employers which makes it [the FN] one of the principal allies of the bosses to maintain the present system.”

Thibault revealed his own political bankruptcy by approving the PS’s programme for the 2012 presidential election as his answer to the FN. It was, he said, “an effort to present a programme which wants to represent alternatives to what’s offered today.” He cynically made this call even though he knew that the PS would ignore its platform once in power: “with time, over months and internal party debates, the platform announced now may not be on the agenda at the time of the electoral rendez-vous.”

The charge of helping the bourgeoisie divide the working class with racism is just as devastating when addressed to the CGT and its ex-”left” supporters—the Communist Party (PCF) and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA)—as it is against the FN. They have backed Sarkozy’s attempts to divide workers along the lines of ethnicity and religion. They have led no strikes or campaigns against anti-democratic bans on the burqa and on the wearing of the headscarf in the schools,

claiming to be fighting for “secularism.”

Nor did the ex-”left” parties protest when in 2009 the CGT used CRS riot police to evict striking undocumented workers from a union hall they had occupied—in the name of keeping the unions running to defend the workers.

The unions’ and bourgeois “left” parties’ covering up of racist policies with cynical pseudo-left slogans has allowed Marine Le Pen to present her racist policies under the banner of “secularism” and “Republican values.” In one poll, 54 percent of sympathisers of the ruling right-wing UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) said they are in “osmosis” with—i.e., feel some sympathy for—the FN.

The newly elected FN leader Marine Le Pen is being packaged in the media as being more concerned with “social” questions than her father Jean-Marie, who as FN leader was notorious for his racist comments for which he was regularly found guilty by the courts.

Marine Le Pen has tried to take on the mantle of respectability by expelling FN members who are exposed as having given Nazi salutes in public. Alexandre Gabriac, an FN candidate in the local elections in Grenoble, was expelled against Jean-Marie Le Pen’s wishes, after a photo showed him giving the Nazi salute.

Most recently, the FN has begun drawing significant support from the unions and ex-”left” circles themselves. This included most prominently a local CGT bureaucrat in eastern France who is a former member of the NPA (see “The case of Fabien Engelmann in France”).

Most recently, an FN local election candidate and member of the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour) union, Daniel Durand-Ducaudin, was threatened with expulsion from his union for his support for the FN. Durand-Ducaudin, a former member of the French Foreign Legion, was recently photographed giving the Nazi salute in Vichy, the capital of the pro-Nazi Pétain regime during World War II.

Durand-Ducaudin justified his participation in the FN by citing the reactionary positions common in the French political establishment, according to which there should be an airtight division between participating in workers’ struggles and carrying out political activity. This principle is never challenged by

the ex-”left” parties, who are closely tied to the unions and are bitterly hostile to left-wing criticism of the unions’ betrayals of workers’ struggles.

Durand-Ducaudin explained, “We must not mix up roles. That of a union to defend workers, the role of a party is to defend ideas.”

The FN is aided in its drive for respectability by ex-”left” media figures like Robert Ménard, the I-Télé TV host and ex- president of the press freedom group, Reporters Without Borders. Ménard has written a pamphlet called “Vive Le Pen” (*Long Live Le Pen*), where he denounces criticisms of the FN as a “witch hunt” and claims those who say the FN has not changed its spots under Marine Le Pen “is to deny the evidence”.

Ménard founded Reporters Without Borders as a pro-Western organisation in 1985 after spending six years in the Revolutionary Communist League (today’s so-called New Anti-Capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot) during the 1970s. He later joined the PS.



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