

Neo-fascist National Front calls for rearming of French imperialism

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13 November 2014

On Tuesday, November 11, the anniversary of the victory of the Allied imperialist powers over Germany in World War I, National Front (FN) leader Marine Le Pen delivered a bellicose speech calling for the rearmament of French imperialism.

Le Pen's statements were reported and commented on favorably by newspapers and the printed press, as well as radio and television, who treated her as an official spokeswoman for the pro-militarist campaign being carried out by the entire ruling class.

She called in particular for an immediate halt to defense budget cuts, a shift towards a systematic increase of military budgets, and a turn towards rapid rearmament.

She demanded a minimum military budget of two percent of France's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and an indefinite €2 billion yearly increase in French defense spending. She called for "protecting the defense budget by a constitutional amendment preventing it from going under 2 percent of GDP." At €31.4 billion, the country's 2014 defense budget is roughly 1.5 percent of GDP. Le Pen also demanded the construction of a second French aircraft carrier.

The FN leader claimed the army's military readiness was catastrophic, a tactic currently being used in Germany to try to browbeat the population into accepting major hikes in defense spending. She said that an "ongoing striptease" was threatening to leave the French army "reduced to the rank of a back-up intervention force serving interests other than our own."

She also called for a return to universal military service. President François Hollande himself had proposed to re-establish universal military service in his mid-term television appearance on November 6.

The FN is not only preparing for war with enemies

abroad, but for civil war against the working class at home. Le Pen called for the creation of a "national guard", a force that would not be used for external interventions but repression within France itself. It would consist of "50,000 men who could rapidly be mobilized [and] could be constituted of military and draftees in the context of a renewed universal military service."

In a speech three years ago, Le Pen proposed to make "a priority of the protection of our national territory ... including by creating a national guard of 50,000 reservists, men and women, that can be mobilized on short notice, less than 24 hours." The intent of this would be to back up police forces and participate in territorial defense, particularly by protecting points of vital strategic interest.

The political ambitions driving Le Pen's intervention are clear. As the deeply unpopular Socialist Party (PS) government of François Hollande sinks into an increasingly intractable crisis of rule, she is presenting herself as the political alternative while advancing the rearmament policy the ruling class supports and making a political appeal to the army.

Last May, a series of high-ranking officers took the unprecedented step of publicly opposing the Hollande government and its proposed cuts to the military budget. Four five-star generals, three army corps leaders and chief of the general staff General Pierre de Villiers threatened to resign to protest a planned €6 billion cut to the defense budget over three years. (See: French president backs generals' revolt against cuts to military budget)

The generals were intervening in a deep crisis of French imperialism. While it imposes draconian austerity against the working class, Hollande is carrying out a series of imperialist interventions, from

Iraq and Syria to the Central African Republic via Mali. Nonetheless, France is slipping behind Germany in terms of military power.

As economic and political tensions grow between the two countries, Germany's military budget just overtook that of France. In four years, it has risen 7 percent to €32.4 billion, while France's fell 2.5 percent over the same period to €31.4 billion. France is still ahead of Germany in terms of spending on weaponry and military equipment, however, with a €12.9 billion annual budget compared to €7.9 billion for Germany.

This constitutes a sharp warning to the working class in France and internationally. The old inter-imperialist rivalries that claimed tens of millions of lives in the wars of the 20th century are returning, amid the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression.

The French bourgeoisie is determined to fully participate in the re-militarization of Europe, currently led by the rearmament campaign by Germany. The ever greater spending required on these preparations for imperialist war abroad and civil war at home will be clawed out of the working class by ever more aggressive attacks on wages and working conditions, and also on democratic rights.

If the neo-fascists are advancing these proposals, it is because the ruling class is increasingly convinced that the FN is best placed politically to impose this program, which has the support of the entire political establishment, on workers. Besides advocating the return to universal military service, several PS officials have already called for using the army to maintain law and order in violent areas of Paris and Marseille.

While Le Pen's proposals could be adopted by any of the parties of French imperialism, from the Gaullist Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) to the PS and the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party, Le Pen nonetheless separates herself from them somewhat by calling for France to leave NATO, thus distancing herself from Washington, and by her opposition to Germany, in the form of her criticism of the European Union.

"We have seen it in Libya, we have seen it in Syria: we were waiting, standing at attention to see what Barack Obama would tell us to do or not to do," Le Pen complained. She called for a military policy that would be "independent, and tied to an independent diplomacy, independent of both NATO and the European Union."

The FN is a ferocious supporter of imperialism. It criticizes France's participation in wars led by Washington or NATO only because they interfered with France's own imperialist interventions. Thus, Le Pen fears that soon, "we might not even be able to carry out the operation in Mali."

Le Pen is clearly putting herself forward as a representative of the armed forces. She made previous proposals on military policy in December 2011, basing herself, according to the news magazine *Marianne*, "on studies by Rear Admiral Jean-Yves Waquet, the former commander of the first [French] nuclear submarine, the Redoutable. She hailed the presence of General Henri Pinard-Legry, the president of the Association for Support of the French Army (ASAF)."

At the time, she said, "We will reaffirm and stress our concept of nuclear deterrence, which will remain the foundation of our defense strategy."



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