The legitimization of Marine Le Pen

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20 January 2015

The international campaign to legitimize the fascistic politics of the French National Front (FN) reached a new stage Monday with the publication in the *New York Times* of an op-ed piece on the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings by the party's leader, Marine Le Pen.

By opening its pages to Le Pen, the *Times*, the crumbling pillar of American liberalism, is signaling that powerful sections of the American ruling class consider her ideas to be a critical part of the public debate. The *Times* took the added step of including a simultaneous translation in French, ensuring that the column would receive the widest possible distribution in France itself.

Le Pen is being elevated as part of a broader effort by the ruling elites to play the anti-Muslim race card in the face of entrenched opposition to imperialist operations in the Middle East and social reaction at home. The anti-Muslim cartoons in *Charlie Hebdo* have been proclaimed symbols of democracy, and now Le Pen is presented as its savior.

Le Pen's chauvinist arguments in the *Times* (under the headline "To Call this Threat by Its Name") are largely drawn from the political arsenal of the US "war on terror." France, "land of human rights and freedoms, was attacked on its own soil by a totalitarian ideology: Islamic fundamentalism," she writes.

She then calls for effectively scrapping freedom and human rights in order to wage political war on France's five-million-strong Muslim population, proposing "a policy restricting immigration," new policies to strip people of citizenship, and a fight against "communalism and ways of life at odds" with French traditions.

While providing a political platform for Le Pen, the *Times* does not bother to inform its readers of her political pedigree. The FN was formed in 1972 by former supporters of the World War II Nazi collaborationist Vichy regime and defenders of French colonial rule in Algeria. It is notorious for its anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic racism, its virulent nationalism, and its thuggish attacks on political opponents.

In justifying their decision to publish Le Pen's column, the editors of the *Times* may argue that whether one likes it or not, Le Pen cannot be ignored. The *Times* and its apologists will probably claim that by providing her with a platform, she is being given the opportunity to expose herself.

This is nonsense. Le Pen is being deliberately legitimized by the *Times*, just as French President François Hollande increased her stature and that of the FN by inviting Le Pen to the Elysée Palace shortly after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks.

The promotion of Le Pen is part of a broader elevation of fascistic and extreme right-wing organizations internationally. Last year, the United States and Germany worked with the Right Sector and Svoboda—organizations that celebrate the Nazi collaborators in Ukraine during World War II—to overthrow the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovych, an operation that was presented across the political establishment as a movement for democracy.

In Germany, as the ruling class moves to cast off all restraints imposed on German militarism following World War II, it is working to downplay and justify the crimes of its past. Jorg Baberowski, a leading historian at Berlin's Humboldt University, recently argued that "Hitler was not cruel," comparing his actions favorably to those of Stalin and the Soviet leadership.

In a recent speech, Chancellor Angela Merkel referred to the need for Christians to "strengthen their identity" and "speak even more and with self-confidence about their Christian values"—an encouragement of anti-Muslim sentiment calculated to bolster and legitimize the racist agitation of the right-wing Pegida movement in Germany.

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As far as growing sections of the corporate-financial aristocracy are concerned, the voices of neo-fascists must be heard. At the same time that her *Times* column appeared, Le Pen was featured in a glowing interview with the *Wall Street Journal*. Pointing to the calculations of the ruling class, the *Journal* argued, “Once a political outlier, Ms. Le Pen has been gaining prominence as France’s problems—a moribund economy and its un-assimilated Muslim population—have become more acute and seemingly beyond cure by the traditional political class.”

Here the *Journal* refers to the fact that, under conditions of protracted economic crisis, the political establishment is deeply discredited in France and internationally. In an effort to create support for its rule, the financial elite is seeking to mobilize sections of the petty-bourgeoisie on the basis of extreme nationalism. At the same time, right-wing forces are exploiting the bankruptcy of the “left” to present themselves as an oppositional force.

The logic of developments is following channels traced previously. Contemporary politics assumes more and more the character of the 1930s, when the ruling elites of Europe turned to fascist parties and forces to defend their rule. Today, the promotion of the likes of Le Pen is part of a broader effort to use anti-Muslim racism as a central plank for imperialist operations abroad and a far-reaching assault on democratic rights at home. The ruling classes in France, the United States, Germany, Britain and the other major imperialist powers are plotting and launching new wars in the Middle East and northern Africa.

Domestically, the ruling class is increasingly concerned about the growth of social opposition in the working class. This week, as billionaires gather in Davos for their annual economic forum, a report has come out showing that by 2016, the richest 1 percent of the world’s population will own more than the bottom 99 percent. The richest 80 individuals own as much wealth as the poorest half of the earth’s inhabitants (about 3.5 billion people). Such conditions are unsustainable. Mass social opposition is inevitable.

Together with a vicious campaign against the immigrant population, the ruling class is promoting and legitimizing fascistic and chauvinist movements in order to direct them against the working class as a whole. The basic lesson of the experiences of the 1930s is that the fight against fascism must be waged as a struggle against the capitalist system and all of its political representatives.

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