

After Le Pen's pro-Nazi outburst, French media try to normalize neo-fascists

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A crisis erupted inside the neo-fascist National Front (FN) last week in the form of a public confrontation between the party's current leader, Marine Le Pen, and her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party's founder and emeritus president.

This conflict, in which the media have actively intervened, was triggered by a long interview by Jean-Marie Le Pen published on April 9 in the far-right weekly *Rivarol*, an anti-Semitic and pro-Vichy publication with a limited circulation. He reiterated in a condensed form the basic views that he has often repeated and that form the foundation of French far-right politics: support for the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, denial of the Holocaust, and minimization of the crimes of the Nazi Occupation.

He had already reiterated on April 2 on RMC radio his previous comments that the gas chambers in Nazi death camps were "a point of detail in history."

These comments and the *Rivarol* interview set off an aggressive public response from FN leaders around Marine Le Pen. She publicly announced on April 9 that she would oppose her father's candidacy in upcoming regional elections. The next day, she announced the opening of disciplinary procedures against him. Leading FN members publicly distanced themselves from him and called for his resignation. Reports on the matter discussed it as an "irrevocable rupture" inside the FN's leadership.

French media are following the statements of neo-fascist leaders with the same care and, for some at least, the same solicitude as the British press covering a crisis in the royal family. Various FN leaders are invited to lay out their viewpoint in innumerable articles and videos.

Many press commentaries are pushing Marine Le Pen to directly and rapidly "seize the opportunity" offered

by this crisis to get rid of her father, who too nakedly represents the true nature of the party, and to reinforce the FN's image as a "democratic" party.

On April 8, under the title "Jean-Marie Le Pen and the truth about the FN," *Le Monde* wrote: "It is either the one or the other. Either Jean-Marie Le Pen, as emeritus president of the FN, is saying out loud what the National Front really thinks ... Or Jean-Marie Le Pen has become a dissident inside his own party, torpedoing all the work that has been done to 'de-demonize' the FN over the last four years. In that case, his daughter and political heir must disavow him and refuse him official positions and candidacies. Between her father and her party, Marine Le Pen must choose. Everyone will judge her choice."

Le Monde, which is often considered to be the French bourgeoisie's "newspaper of record," is clearly arguing for Marine Le Pen to advance a "de-demonized" and more presentable neo-fascist line. It does not want to see the FN advance an overly controversial, openly pro-fascist position that would block its rise to power. It thus proposes a deal to Le Pen junior: here is a golden opportunity to pretend to break with the past atrocities of fascism, and you must take it. Some sections of the bourgeoisie no doubt add: once you are in power, you can drop the mask.

Since the beginning of the campaign to "de-demonize" the FN, the bourgeois media have tried to promote as sincere the FN's attempts to distance itself from its traditional support for the Vichy regime and for France's bloody colonial rule in Algeria. The FN was presented as "democratic," "populist," or even "popular," but in any case close to traditional bourgeois politics.

This is in fact a political operation aimed at camouflaging the elements that would too visibly show

the FN to be a fascist party. In fact, the opposition between the two lines within the FN, that of Marine Le Pen and that of her father, is tactical and not fundamental.

Le Pen senior's comments that his daughter's political team is now criticizing, and particularly his defense of the Vichy regime, are part of the common heritage of the entire FN. When the far-right publicist Eric Zemmour published his book, *The suicide of France*, in which he sought to rehabilitate the Vichy regime and its head of state Marshal Philippe Pétain, he was invited very broadly to speak at FN meetings. The book was reviewed before publication by Philippe Martel, Marine Le Pen's chief of staff.

If the FN leadership now pretends to be shocked by the anti-Semitic comments of the party's founder, it is a cynical ploy. The FN has not abandoned its historical sympathies either for the Vichy regime or for "French Algeria."

Marine Le Pen simply superimposed a form of Islamophobia draped in the colors of the French Republic, which she in fact shares with the entire French ruling elite, over the Vichyite heritage of her party. She pragmatically calculates that she will win more by denouncing Islam and immigrants than by publicly defending the Vichy regime and the Holocaust.

The Vichy regime remains, however, the classical counter-revolutionary experience of the French bourgeoisie in the face of a revolutionary challenge from the working class—one that it installed, though it sought to make use of the Nazi invasion of 1940 to do so. The FN represents this tradition, and all of its factions emerge from it. The political and media representatives of French imperialism, terrified by rising working class anger against austerity and the Socialist Party (PS) government, know this well, and this is why they are seeking to promote the FN.

One major concern they have is how to promote the FN without provoking explosive opposition in the working class, despite all the historical experiences of fascist barbarism in the 20th century. They therefore prefer to advance under cover and somewhat camouflage the fascistic and repressive character of the FN.

An operation like that proposed by *Le Monde*, allowing the FN to more convincingly claim it has

demonstrated its democratic bona fides, would also open up the path towards alliances and governmental coalition with virtually any party inside the French political establishment.

Thus Malek Boutih, a PS legislator and the former leader of the SOS-Racism organization, declared: "I will not get upset if people try to evolve and to break with anti-Semitism, with racism, and with everything that I have fought against for many years." He added, "If Marine Le Pen manages to break from this history, it's all the better for her and for the country, it is really more reassuring."

The comments of Boutih and *Le Monde* underscore the complicity of various corrupt and reactionary forces, be they social-democratic or pseudo-left, in the rise of the FN.



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