

France's neo-fascist National Front expels its founder Jean-Marie Le Pen

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France's neo-fascist National Front (FN) has expelled its founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, over his repeated remarks defending the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime in France and minimising the Holocaust. His expulsion, which sections of the bourgeois media have actively demanded, is a transparent attempt by the FN to rebrand itself as a mainstream party.

On August 20, the FN's Executive Board held a disciplinary session and voted to oust Le Pen after hearing his arguments.

Le Pen's daughter Marine, who succeeded him as head of the party in 2011, had summoned him to answer fifteen complaints presented to the party. He was accused of having granted interviews to outlets such as BFM TV and RMC, as well as to the far-right weekly *Rivarol*, in which he defended the Vichy regime and trivialised the Holocaust.

Le Pen has repeatedly told interviewers that the gas chambers were a "detail of history" and defended Marshal Philippe Pétain, who led the Vichy regime. Le Pen had declared, "I never considered Marshal Pétain as a traitor. They were very harsh with him at the Liberation. And I never considered that people who kept a liking for the marshal to be bad Frenchmen or people I could not meet."

The elder Le Pen's remarks triggered a dispute inside the FN, as they jeopardised Marine Le Pen's policy of "normalizing" the FN. Leading officials around the daughter took a tough stance against the father. In April, Marine Le Pen said that she was "in profound disagreement" with her father and opposed his candidacy in the upcoming regional elections to be held in December.

Marine Le Pen called a special meeting in May in which senior FN officials suspended her father's membership. He protested the decision, and the

Nanterre court ruled in his favour, reinstating him. The younger Le Pen then convened an extraordinary general meeting to eliminate the title of honorary party president held by her father. Although the party majority voted in favour of eliminating his title in July, the ballot was again annulled by the courts.

Condemning last week's decision, Le Pen said he was "indignant" that he had been the victim of an "ambush" by a "rump political bureau". He said that his daughter "excludes everyone who is not 100 per cent in agreement with her," vowing to attend the party conference next month.

Marine Le Pen called the decision "logical," adding: "Jean-Marie Le Pen started a process, knowing what the result would be, multiplying his mistakes over many weeks."

The FN's decision to sideline Le Pen is a move based on tactical considerations. Since Marine Le Pen took over the party leadership, she has tried to "de-demonize" the party by downplaying the nakedly fascistic and anti-Semitic views of the FN, symbolized by her father.

An FN official commented, "In the run-up to the regional and presidential elections, the party leader is doing everything she can to defuse potential accusations of racism or anti-Semitism against us. The conflict is exclusively over this."

With the vast majority of the population deeply disillusioned with France's mainstream parties, including the ruling Socialist Party (PS) and the conservative Republicans, the FN has gained significant electoral successes in recent elections. It has profited more broadly from the shift of the entire political establishment far to the right. The FN's promotion of anti-immigrant chauvinism, law and order measures, austerity and imperialist wars are now well

within mainstream French politics.

Conflicts have developed within the FN as the party has grown, absorbing forces coming from the periphery of the PS, such as Florian Philippot, the party's vice-president and associate of ex-PS member Jean-Pierre Chevènement.

After Le Pen's expulsion, *Le Monde* noted that Philippot, who had "fought, since the beginning of this conflict, for the exclusion of Mr Le Pen, recently opined that this break-up 'had to happen,' one way or another. 'There is a strong demand for it from public opinion,' stated the FN vice-president."

By expelling Le Pen, the FN is acting in line with broad sections of the political establishment that are also seeking ways to brand and market it as an acceptable party of government.

In an April 8 editorial, *Le Monde* wrote: "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."

While the media is playing up the conflict between Le Pen and his daughter Marine, it is in the final analysis tactical and not principled in character. The expulsion of Le Pen senior is the preparation to further integrate the FN into mainstream politics, to prepare yet another shift even further to the right by the entire ruling class.



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