

French ruling class promotes memoirs of neo-fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen

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When on March 1, bookstores started selling the memoirs of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) and father of its current leader Marine Le Pen, the French corporate media largely moved to promote the book. A vast operation to rehabilitate the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, to defend torture and the crimes of French imperialism in Algeria and to downplay the Holocaust is underway.

The book was published by a small ultra-right publisher, who “shares the national values that are at the heart of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s political activity” according to one of its representatives, but it was the mass media that was tasked with promoting it—publishing large extracts of the book and interviewing its author.

The extracts they cited present the pro-Vichy former supporter of the Algerian-colonialist *Organisation armée secrète* (OAS), a fanatical anti-communist and founder of France’s principal far-right party, as a credible political commentator on events after World War II.

Newspapers and magazines presented as good coin the image that Le Pen gave of himself, as a man of the people, humane and cultured, “who loves poetry.” News magazine *Le Point* led its issue that week with this subject, calling Le Pen a “born storyteller about himself [who] seeks to reveal, over the course of many pages, a personality the general public does not know, more humane, more romantic, less hysterical.” The newspaper *Le Parisien* hailed the memoirs as “a story with the allure of a picaresque novel, where he particularly stresses his military adventures, even if he sometimes dresses them up a bit.”

A politician who led a parachutist unit that tortured countless people during the Algerian war, who specializes in historical falsification, anti-Semitism and

denials of the crimes of the Nazis, and who was repeatedly convicted in the courts due to these views, is now presented as an “honest man” or even a “son of the people.” What is taking place?

It is impossible to answer this question without understanding the current political needs of French imperialism, and above all the international degeneration of capitalism.

As the French financial aristocracy builds a new Franco-German military axis around a policy of neo-colonial war in the Middle East and great-power conflict, it is forced to rehabilitate even the most extreme expressions of nationalism and militarism—Vichy and the colonial war in Algeria. In order to prepare the next wars it is planning, and overcome the opposition of a population deeply disillusioned with war, it must falsify the history of its past crimes.

This is why the memoirs of Le Pen, hailing the colonial army and its methods, defending Nazi-collaborationist forces and falsifying history, finds such a warm response in official media.

Just as German professors are excusing and minimizing the Nazi crimes of the World War II era to rehabilitate Hitler and militarism, the French bourgeoisie is trying to whitewash its participation in the Holocaust as well as its crimes against the people of the countries it colonized.

Le Pen’s memoirs are full of hymns to the glory of French imperialism in Indochina (i.e., Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) and Algeria, which he fully defends. Already in 1960, long before he founded the FN in 1972, as the OAS stepped up its terrorist activities in Algeria, as well as within France itself, Le Pen had founded the “National Front for a French Algeria.”

Le Point, which is close to the current government of

President Emmanuel Macron, quoted without any critical comments Le Pen's cynical legitimization of the large-scale use of torture by the French army in Algeria: "People spoke of torture. Those who carried it out were denounced. The French army was coming back from Indochina. There it had seen horrific violence that went beyond what could be imagined, and made pulling people's fingernails out seem almost humane. ... Our job was to put an end to the horror. ... So yes, the French army indeed used interrogation methods to obtain information during the battle of Algiers, but the methods it used were the least violent possible ... there was nothing that touched people's physical integrity."

Another theme of Le Pen to which *Le Point* gives a pass is the defense of the Vichy regime and collaboration with the Third Reich. Echoing the post-war myth that Vichy leader Marshal Philippe Pétain collaborated because he wanted to "protect" the French people, Le Pen insists that the Pétain regime was "legal and legitimate, it made a normal and binding agreement with the Reich."

He continues, "The Marshal [Pétain] had the enormous responsibility of getting by [with the surrender to the Nazis] to allow his forty million fellow citizens to survive. ... One can then discuss the collaboration policy, its errors, its excesses, that is fine as long as everyone's errors and excesses are examined, too, but it does not change what I have described."

Le Pen's remarks show how the FN and Jean-Marie Le Pen speak for broad sections of the French bourgeoisie that ardently supported Nazism and still did so after World War II—though they could not speak openly in the face of deep anti-fascist sentiment in the working class. Today, as they move to spend hundreds of billions of euros on war and slash social programs for the working class, these forces feel they can safely venerate their political ancestors.

The FN, founded in 1972, is directly descended from the French Popular Party (PPF) of Jacques Doriot, one of the pillars of the collaboration. Among the FN's initial leaders were Victory Barthélemy, the former PPF general secretary whose participation in the *Rafle du Vél d'Hiv* mass round-up of Jews for deportation is well documented, and who became the FN's first general secretary. The FN leadership embraced other ex-

PPF figures, including André Dufrasse, a member of the Legion of French Volunteers against Bolshevism (LVF), which went to fight in the Nazi war of annihilation against the Soviet Union.

Another associate of Le Pen was Paul Malaguti, the "killer of Cannes," who worked for the Gestapo in Cannes and later took care of the FN's finances. Other founding FN members include Henry Coston, who launched the Anti-Jewish Youth movement in 1930 and an explicitly pro-Nazi party in 1933; François Brigneau of the fascist National Popular Rally of Marcel Déat; and the former Waffen-SS member Pierre Bousquet, the FN's first treasurer.

Another stock-in-trade of the former FN leader is Holocaust denial and anti-Semitic statements. In the interviews Le Pen gave about the publication of his book, he again asserted that the gas chambers in the Nazi death camps were a "detail of history," statements for which he has repeatedly been convicted. He has also cynically declared in an interview that he "might maybe recognize that the Holocaust happened" in the second volume of his memoirs, but that he felt no need to apologize for his previous statements: "I will not ask for forgiveness to anyone. I feel compassion for those who suffered, as I did also, of the war."

By favorably quoting Le Pen's remarks, *Le Point* and broad swathes of the French bourgeois media are doing their part to rehabilitate the crimes of French imperialism and the Vichy regime during World War II, which the French financial aristocracy sees as a critical priority. Class-conscious workers and youth will reject these attempts with contempt, and see in them a warning as to the reactionary policies French imperialism is preparing today.



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