

France's fascist National Front congress sets out "to take power"

Francis Dubois
12 March 2018

On March 10-11, France's neo-fascist National Front (FN) held its first party congress since FN presidential candidate Marine Le Pen lost the May 2017 elections to President Emmanuel Macron. Since then, the FN has been shaken by an internal conflict over its line on the European Union, and its leadership has announced plans for a "refoundation" of the party.

Le Pen, the only candidate for president of the party, was re-elected with 100 percent of the vote. She declared, "Our objective is clear, it is to take power." She also proposed to rename the FN the *Rassemblement National* (National Rally). One of the reasons invoked by FN officials for the name change was to drop a name widely associated with neo-fascism in France that would make it easier for the party to make alliances with other political forces, including the traditional right.

The FN organized its party congress so as to stress the international rise of far right forces on both sides of the Atlantic. Le Pen's speech was preceded by a video message from Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's far-right Lega (formerly the Northern League).

The congress was marked by the surprise appearance on Saturday of former Trump adviser and former head of the far-right Breitbart News site, Steve Bannon. To stormy applause from the FN delegates, he said: "Let them call you racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic ... Wear it as a badge of honour. Because every day, we get stronger and they get weaker." He added, "You are part of a worldwide movement that is bigger than Italy, bigger than Poland, bigger than Hungary."

FN founder Jean-Marie Le Pen, the father of Marine, whom Marine expelled from the party, while signing copies of his memoirs during the speech, commented: "I think this is not exactly the definition of de-demonization" of the FN.

Since 2016, Bannon has been in contact with the FN founder's granddaughter, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who officially abandoned her positions in the FN and her seat in the National Assembly after the presidential elections, declaring she was leaving politics for a time to enter "into civilian life." She declared in 2016 that there had been contacts between Trump's team and the FN. Bannon, for his part, called Marion Maréchal-Le Pen a new rising star in the FN, in an interview where he laid out his ambitions to expand the operations of Breitbart News to France.

After Trump's election, Maréchal-Le Pen said she would say "yes to the invitation of Stephen Bannon, director of the Trump campaign, to work together." Last month, while technically still in political retirement, she travelled to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, DC to speak. In Lille, Bannon again hailed Maréchal-Le Pen, declaring that she is an "impressive" personality.

On Sunday, in a demagogic and protectionist speech, Marine Le Pen attacked globalization and promoted nationalism as an alternative. She presented the FN as an anti-establishment and anti-Macron party, denouncing "money" and advancing xenophobic rhetoric accompanied by masked appeals to anti-Semitism. On this basis, she even made cynical criticisms of Macron's plans to privatize the rail service, declaring: "Two conceptions of the world are facing off ... The globalists against the nationalists."

Without openly calling for an exit from the European Union and the common euro currency, she announced that the FN is preparing to rewrite the main EU treaties. In a poll held in November, a majority of FN members said that they supported leaving the euro and the EU.

Le Pen evoked all the basic themes of the FN, in barely coded language, presenting appeals against

immigrants and Muslims as a “defence of Christian culture” or a need for a strong security policy. The FN’s anti-worker outlook appeared clearly when Le Pen said that “part of our programme is to put an end to May 1968,” the date of the last major French general strike, to enthusiastic applause.

Continuing its tactic of hiding its cloven hoof, its historic roots in the French collaboration with Nazism in World War II and the attempt to maintain French colonial rule during the Algerian war, the FN voted new party statutes eliminating Jean-Marie Le Pen’s position as honorary president. It was thus distancing itself from the party founder, repeatedly convicted for anti-Semitic statements and Holocaust denial, and ultimately expelled from the FN in 2015. The FN renamed its central committee the national committee, without making any major obvious changes in its personnel.

Overall, French mass media presented the congress as showing that the FN is moving towards the centre and the mainstream, compelled to open itself to less hard-line tendencies and to “normalize” its politics. It was also presented as a party in deep crisis, destined for a time to play a minor role, with Marine Le Pen politically weakened or even finished.

Nothing would be further from the truth, however. The European bourgeoisie is putting neo-fascist parties into government, as in Austria, or integrating them without difficulty into plans for re-militarization and attacks on workers’ social rights, as in Germany.

In fact, it is not the FN that is moving to the centre but the financial aristocracy that is moving towards the far right. Over the last five years, the ruling class has systematically taken over the FN’s policies. Under the Socialist Party (PS) government of President François Hollande, or now under Macron, the French financial oligarchy imposed a state of emergency giving full powers to police, and considered writing the deprivation of nationality into the constitution; appealed to anti-Muslim sentiment; and stepped up appeals for a return to the draft.

Now, a section of the French ruling elite together with the American far right is promoting Marion Maréchal-Le Pen as an alternative to her aunt Marine Le Pen, whom many press outlets are dismissing as incapable of leading the FN to power.

But Jean-Marie Le Pen’s granddaughter is very far to

the right, a figure tied to the royalist *Action française* movement, the descendant of the anti-Semitic *Action française* of Charles Maurras, the main basis of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, and to Catholic fundamentalists. Bannon’s nomination to the White House was applauded by the Ku Klux Klan and the *Daily Stormer*, a neo-Nazi site whose name refers to the violently anti-Semitic paper of Julius Streicher, one of the Nazi leaders condemned to death in the Nuremberg Trials.

Thus, what took place at the Lille FN congress was not a reorientation towards the centre, or a lasting move by the neo-fascists toward moderation. It was an operation to reinforce its ties with the more extreme right-wing sections of the Republican Party in the United States, while reasserting the FN’s historic ties with the fascist and colonialist past of French imperialism.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact