# Far-right deputy launches anti-immigrant outburst in French National Assembly

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On November 3, Unsubmissive France (LFI) deputy Carlos Martens Bilongo was the subject of a racist outburst by National Rally (RN) deputy Pierre de Fournas in the French National Assembly. While Bilongo was speaking during a debate about immigration, de Fournas said: "He can return to Africa [*Qu'il retourne on Afrique*]."

Contrary to de Fournas' assertion, Bilongo, who is black, was in fact born in Villiers-le-Bel, in the northern suburbs of Paris. Bilongo is a former teacher and a member of LFI. He was elected to the assembly representing 8th constituency of Val d'Oise as a candidate for the LFI-led New Popular Ecological and Social Union (NUPES) coalition in the June 2022 legislative elections.

The Assembly was immediately suspended after de Fournas' remarks. Despite calls for de Fournas' ouster, he got away with a slap on the wrist. On November 4, the Assembly voted to ban the deputy for 15 days and to suspend half his parliamentary allowance for two months. All deputies, except those from RN, voted in favor of the sanctions.

In response to the de Fournas comment, Bilongo said in a statement, "This hateful outburst lifts the mask on the danger that the RN still represents for our country." LFI leader Jean Luc Mélenchon denounced RN as, "what they have always been, racists, fascists." French President Emmanuel Macron stated he was "offended" by these "intolerable words."

Bourgeois political commentators presented the event as a blow to RN leader Marine Le Pen's efforts to "de-demonize" her far-right party by downplaying its historical and political ties to 20th-century fascism.

The November 3 debate concerned the fate of the Ocean Viking, a SOS Mediterranean rescue ship with 230 migrants on board which was stranded in the Mediterranean. De Fournas claims his remarks actually referred to the occupants of Ocean Viking. In a Twitter post, de Fournas said he was "totally innocent of the facts" but that he accepted the outcome to be "respectful of the institution [the National Assembly], I submit to it."

Marine Le Pen supported de Fournas' claim, describing his remarks as "clumsiness" and denouncing a "coarse" polemic on the part of the RN's adversaries.

The neo-fascists' defense of de Fournas' record of racist rhetoric is politically contemptible. In 2019, de Fournas responded to a tweet by an African man asking which cities are most diverse in France by telling him that if he "wants to be with black people, he can go to Africa." His defense amounts to claiming that he did not make a racist outburst against a French parliamentarian, but against defenseless refugees, who are fleeing the devastating impact of global warming and France's illegal wars in Libya and the Sahel.

De Fournas' remarks are the product of the increasingly anti-immigrant and racist evolution of the entire French political establishment, which has been supported by every establishment party, from Mélenchon's LFI to the extreme right.

President Macron's own "offence" at the rhetoric of de Fournas is shot through with hypocrisy. Against immigrants and French Muslims, Macron's government put into practice what de Fournas told Bilongo in words. Despite winning two elections by campaigning on the defense of "republican values" against the Le Pen, his government's 2021 racist "anti-separatist" law went a considerable way towards the far-right's goal of legally turning Muslims in France to second-class citizens.

The specific case of the Ocean Viking rescue over which the assembly was debating is another indictment

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of Macron's vicious anti-immigrant policy. Ocean Viking's 230 passengers were left stranded in the Mediterranean, while the French and Italian governments refused to let the vessel dock. While the boat finally landed in Toulon on November 11, this was only for "medical evaluation."

In line with de Fournas' outburst, rather than granting the refugees asylum, as is required by international law, the Macron government is engaged in its own campaign to make them "return to Africa."

Despite his left-wing demagogy, Mélenchon has provided effective support for the state's anti-immigrant campaign. For years he has backed the French state's attack on French Muslims' right to wear a veil. In 2021, LFI abstained on the vote for the crucial Article 4 of the anti-separatist law as it passed through the Assembly. Mélenchon has also supported French imperialism's interventions in Mali and Libya.

The scandal over de Fournas' remarks come as the ruling class makes broader preparations for a far-right government in France. Large sections of the state apparatus and military seek the return of fascism in France. This year, fascist commentator and advocate of the "great replacement" conspiracy theory Eric Zemmour ran for president. In *Current Values* magazine, which backed Zemmour's presidential bid, French army officers wrote of preparing to wage a coming "civil war" inside France, in which deaths "will be counted in the thousands."

Marine Le Pen and her RN party are continuously promoted in billionaire-owned media as the only viable alternative to the widely hated Macron government. Despite popular opposition to RN's policies, widespread hatred of Macron let Le Pen win 41.45 percent of the vote in this April's presidential election, the highest-ever total for a far-right candidate in France. This is part of an international phenomenon which saw the rise to power of Trump in the US and most recently Meloni, a political descendant of Mussolini, in Italy.

The success of the far-right across Europe is primarily a result of the cowardice and bankruptcy of what the ruling establishment falsely promotes as the "left." Despite Mélenchon denouncing RN as "racists" and "fascists," and Bilongo's acknowledgement of the danger posed by the far-right in France, LFI and the NUPES coalition is utterly hostile to mobilizing the working class against the threat of neo-fascism and military dictatorship.

As is the case internationally, far-right policies are hugely unpopular in France. The French public does not support far-right policies and the vast majority abhor racism. For example, a 2021 Harris Interactive poll found 89 percent of French people oppose discrimination against non-French nationals in the workplace, the flagship policy of Le Pen's 2022 presidential campaign.

However, even when its own deputies are the victims of racist attacks, LFI prostrates itself in front of the far right. Even though 8 million people voted for Mélenchon in the first round of the 2022 presidential election, he has done nothing to mobilize these supporters, let alone the wider working class, in protests and strikes against neo-fascism and the fascistic policies of Macron.

De Fournas' remarks in the National Assembly are a further indication of the extent to which racism and fascistic attitudes dominate not only RN but the entire ruling class. The only force powerful enough to wage a successful struggle against the ruling class's promotion of far right, racism, and all forms of bigotry is the international working class. LFI's refusal to mount any significant response to this attack on its own member, once again underlines that the fight against the rise of fascism requires a political break from the pseudo-left parties and the independent mobilization of the working class.

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