

French courts ban neo-fascist Marine Le Pen from 2027 presidential elections

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French courts convicted National Rally (RN) leader Marine Le Pen and two dozen other leading RN members of embezzling European Parliament funds yesterday. They imposed unusually heavy sentences, including a partially-suspended four-year prison sentence and a five-year ban on running for office on Le Pen. A leading contender in the 2027 presidential elections, Le Pen has pledged to appeal both the electoral ban, which is effective immediately, and the prison sentences.

While the RN is an utterly reactionary party, descending from the French collaboration with Nazism in World War II, this ruling is bankrupt and deserves no support. Workers cannot stop fascism, militarism and police-state rule by supporting bans imposed by the courts. The far right can only be fought politically through the mobilization of the working class in struggle.

Bitter historical experience—above all, with measures the German state took against the Nazi party before Hitler's installation in power in 1933—show that capitalist state bans against the far right set the stage for even more draconian state attacks on the left and the working class.

By setting out to decide the RN's fate over the heads of the workers, the courts strengthen it. They are not exposing the neo-fascists as enemies of the working class, who support imperialist war and police-state repression. Rather, they are letting the RN posture as an aggrieved party, targeted for unusually harsh punishment by the state machine, and who now aims to defend its voters against a regime overseen by France's deeply unpopular president, Emmanuel Macron.

There is little doubt that, from a legal standpoint, the RN is guilty as charged. While the EU has strict requirements that parliamentary assistants work only on

parliamentary issues and not for their party, Le Pen tried to use parliamentary assistants' salaries to help repay the debts of the RN, which was then largely cut off from bank financing. Some €2.9 million in EU funds were allegedly involved. RN officials warned Le Pen in the 2010s that this exposed her to prosecution.

In 2014, RN treasurer Wallerand de Saint-Just emailed Marine Le Pen, stating: "We can get out of the hole only if we make important savings thanks to the European parliament." He warned far-right member of the EU parliament Jean-Luc Schaffhauser: "What Marine is asking us to do is equivalent [to] signing for fictitious jobs. ... I understand why Marine is doing this, but we are going to get shot down for it."

There is, however, a stark contrast between the harsh sentences imposed on the RN compared to other parties found guilty of organizing similar "fictitious jobs." Indeed, the bourgeois Socialist Party (PS) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem) of current Prime Minister François Bayrou were both found guilty in the last three years on such charges. While PS and MoDem officials escaped with at most suspended prison sentences, the RN is being targeted for decapitation.

Le Pen faces a minimum of 2 years in house arrest with electronic monitoring bracelet plus two years' suspended prison sentence, as well as a five-year election ban. RN Vice President Louis Aliot faces three years' electoral ban and 6 months house arrest with electronic bracelet plus a year suspended prison sentence, and former RN deputy leader Bruno Gollnisch faces three years in prison including 2 years house arrest. Oddly, while RN accountant Christophe Moreau was cleared, Le Pen's bodyguard Thierry Légier faces a one-year suspended prison sentence.

Significantly, while the French presidency was doubtless consulted on the ruling, the government did

not publicly defend it. Bayrou, who said last year after his party escaped its fictitious jobs scandal that the charges against the RN were “unfair,” said yesterday that he was “disturbed by what was read out in the ruling” against Le Pen.

Last night, Le Pen appeared on a prime-time TV interview on TF1 and pledged to fight the ban. “I am eliminated [from the 2027 elections], but it is the voice of millions of French people that is eliminated today,” she said. She dismissed the charges against her as an “administrative disagreement with the European parliament. There was no personal enrichment involved.” Noting that the courts could delay two years before taking her appeal, she warned that RN voters would not see a president elected in 2027 in an election from which she had been banned as legitimate.

The RN is threatening to organize protests against the ban. Yesterday, RN President Jordan Bardella said “French democracy has been executed” and, calling for a “popular and pacifist mobilization,” pledged that he and other RN officials would travel across France to speak to angry RN voters.

PS and Green officials are hailing the ban on Le Pen, with PS deputy Jérôme Guedj claiming that it defends the principle that elected officials must have “exemplary behavior.” This phrasemongering will not stop the far right.

The RN has risen since 2012 due to the reactionary class dynamic of the governments of PS President François Hollande and his successor, Macron. Attacking the working class to fund war and bank bailouts, they rested ever more narrowly on the police and security forces to repress strikes and protests, and on the promotion of far-right politics popular among the security forces. After Hollande resurrected Algerian war-era legislation to impose a two-year state of emergency suspending democratic rights and banning protests, Macron hailed Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as he sent riot police to assault “yellow vest” protests against social inequality.

The crisis of French democracy has reached unprecedented intensity in Macron’s second term. In 2023, he imposed a pension cut opposed today by 91 percent of the French people to fund a €100 billion increase in military spending. Now he is pressing for a French military intervention in Ukraine threatening total war with Russia that is rejected by a vast majority

of the French people.

The harsh sentences meted out to the RN do not reflect opposition to neo-fascism in the capitalist state machine, but bitter conflicts in the ruling class over geopolitical orientation amid deepening tensions between US and European imperialism over Trump’s tariffs and war in Ukraine. While Macron works with Germany to spend €800 billion on the EU war machine, Le Pen has previously called for closer relations with the US military.

These inter-imperialist conflicts are erupting into the open after the Le Pen ruling. Trump called it “a big deal,” while his ally, billionaire Elon Musk, denounced the ruling as “abuse of the judicial system.” Far-right Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni and ex-Brazilian Prime Minister Jair Bolsonaro issued statements defending Le Pen.

There is deep, historically-rooted opposition among workers to fascism and war, but mobilizing it requires irreconcilably opposing both pro-EU and pro-Trump factions of the capitalist class.

France Unbowed (LFI) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon tried to adapt to popular distrust of the ban on Le Pen, saying: “The decision to impeach an elected official should come from the people.” But Mélenchon has not fought for the working class to bring down anti-democratic officials or governments. Tacitly backing the union bureaucracies’ sell-out of strikes against Macron’s pension cuts, and endorsing Macron’s candidates in last year’s elections despite the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, he blocked a struggle of the working class against fascism and war.

Explosive class battles are on the agenda in France and across Europe, as governments slash social spending to fund EU rearmament. Le Pen cannot be fought through the courts, but only through the class struggle and, by freeing these struggles from the deadening grip of the union bureaucracies and political helpmates of Macron, linking these to mounting resistance among workers and youth internationally to fascism and war.



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