France: The FN: twists and turns of a fascist front

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The French Front National (FN) was founded in 1972 as a coalition of fascist tendencies. It grouped together Vichy collaborators, young thugs and a handful of non-party fascists, like Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had played minor roles in the post-war history of the French far-right. By 1980 the FN had only 270 members, of whom scarcely 100 were fully paid-up. Three years later the FN won 2.2 million votes in the European elections and Le Pen?s face was on the front page of every newspaper. Over the next 10 years, the FN was able to put down deep roots and is now a fundamental feature of the political landscape. Its impact on every other political party has been enormous.

To decide on the exact nature and seriousness of the threat it poses to the workers? movement and to immigrant communities in France it is vital to understand the trajectory of the FN. Is it towards the creation of a fully and openly fascist mass party or is it evolving in the direction of a virulently racist but fundamentally electoral party, a component of some future right-wing parliamentary majority? To answer these questions it is necessary to evaluate what Jean-Marie Le Pen has called, ?adapting our thinking and our actions to the realities of the modern world?.

An overview of FN?s development

The history of the FN can be divided into four overlapping phases. The first began with the foundation of the organisation in 1972. The FN never attempted to conceal either its fascist ideological origins or its political objectives during this phase and it was tiny.

A new phase began when it attempted to transform itself into a demagogic racist electoral front, an organisation in which the leadership?s fascist politics and past were hidden in order to win wider support. It was in 1983, during this second phase, having become what we call a fascist front, that the FN made its first big electoral breakthrough. It did so by riding the high tide of the prevailing racism and economic liberalism which hit France at that time. Le Pen shrewdly played the part of a racist and populist demagogue but carefully avoided being cast as an out-and-out fascist. In the mid-1980s this turn encouraged non-fascist currents and individuals, especially those associated with the Club de l?Horloge, to fuse with Le Pen?s front.

From 1989, attempts were made to execute another turn, to transform the FN into a fascist organisation or, at the very least, to test the willingness of its electorate and membership to support more nakedly fascist policies. Le Pen made some notorious anti-Semitic ?slips of the tongue?. There was a turn to more street-fighting. To cap it all, following its leader?s anti-Semitic instincts, the party came out in opposition the Gulf War. This stance clashed with the mainly anti-Arab racism of its electoral base and led to the loss of a good deal of its support.

The latest phase might be termed the ?post-Le Pen phase?. Its focus is the April 1995 presidential elections (the last in which the current leader will stand). Already, a major rift is opening up between those who want to hold fast to the populist racist line of the 1980s, never fully abandoned, and those who want to
push further the 1989 turn and bring the FN?s fascist politics to the fore.

This is only the latest expression of the contradiction at work throughout the four phases of the FN?s history. A largely fascist leadership and cadre has to hide its politics from a non-fascist electoral base. Some elements of the leadership, pleased with the electoral successes that the party?s endorsement of anti-immigrant racism and free market reaction brought it in the 1980s, are resisting moves to turn the FN into an openly fascist organisation.

The FN does not claim to be a fascist party, and its basic political methods are certainly not those of Mussolini?s Fascist Party and Hitler?s NSDAP. It espouses no pseudo-socialist or ?revolutionary? ideology, nor does it organise the mass of its followers into disciplined street gangs to attack Arabs, Jews, trade unionists and the Left. Despite its racism, its anti-semitism and its anti-working-class politics, the FN is not yet a fully fledged fascist party. However, this is no excuse for the slightest complacency.

The journalist René Monzat put the matter very well:

?It isn?t a question of applying the label ?fascist? to the FN at all costs but of recognising that the FN and the New Right are attempting to create social, political and cultural conditions comparable to those which enabled the birth of fascist and Nazi parties in pre-war Italy and Germany. Their success or failure depends partly on us.?3

The origins of the FN
The FN was founded in October 1972 as a common front uniting various fascist groups. Each of these was committed to forming a federation comprising fascists and the nationalist far right. But if its choice of leaders in 1972 is anything to go by, it was far from being a broad church.

Its principal leader was Le Pen who, although he had never belonged to any openly fascist organisation, had been a fellow-traveller of all the post-war fascist and far-right organisations. In 1958 his organisation, the ?Front National des Combattants? signed a joint manifesto with the openly fascist Algerian-based ?Front National Français? that described the two groups as ?nationalists?, ?socialists?, ?Europeans?, ?anti-captialists?, ?anti-communists? and ?anti-parliamentarists?.4

The other leaders of the FN all had impeccable open fascist credentials.

? Victor Barthélémy, elected Secretary General, had been Administrative Secretary in Jacques Doriot?s pre-war PPF, an openly fascist party.

? François Brigneau, the Vice-President, had been in the Militia (the Vichy Gestapo) in Vichy?s openly fascist period. He was a close friend of Le Pen.

? The Treasurer, Pierre Bousquet, had volunteered for the Charlemagne Division (the French Division of the SS) and had fought on the Eastern Front against the USSR.

Among the various tendencies in this coalition were Ordre Nouveau (a hardened fascist organisation), Militant (set up in 1967 by former SS men)5, members of the Neo-Nazi FANE, the ?National Revolutionary Groups? which published denials that the Holocaust ever took place. The coalition never numbered more than a few hundred.

The FN soon drew the disparate strands of the far right into its orbit. In 1974, the main fascist organisation, Ordre Nouveau was disbanded. The FN rapidly became the clearing-house for all fascists. ?National revolutionaries belong in the Front National. Dual membership is allowed and the FN will respect
members? ideological choices. The hope was that this "broad church" would also facilitate a breakthrough to the masses.

But by 1977, they were still wallowing around in the dregs of fascism. New forces arrived in the shape of Jean-Pierre Stirbois and other "Solidarist" cadres. The Solidarists began life in 1966 as the Young Revolution Movement but changed their name in 1971 to the French Solidarist Movement. They were founded by two former OAS men and were distinguished by the virulence of their national-revolutionary anti-communism. "Force is the only way to deal with reds and reaction?, they declared.

Stirbois was not the only Solidarist to rush to Le Pen?s aid. Bernard Antony, closely linked to the OAS in the early 1960s, joined, as did Pierre Sergent, also of the OAS, who presented himself as the voice of the army inside the FN.

But these fascists enabled the FN to make its first attempt to build a genuine fascist front. They supported Le Pen?s turn away from fascist "sectarianism" towards a united front with non-fascist racists and rightists. J-F Touzé, a former adviser to Stirbois, put the matter succinctly:

?In the late 1970s, Le Pen became aware that his movement had reached a dead end. Had he stuck with the survivors of the Second World War or with their political heirs, his party would have remained a tiny sect.?9

The big break

In 1981, François Mitterrand came to power as the first Socialist President of the Fifth republic. Following 15 months of Keynesian policies the Socialist-Communist government was pulled up by an IMF austerity package. It rapidly turned to imposing savage cuts in public spending and attacks on workers? living standards. Disillusion and demoralisation grew rapidly amongst the working class as unemployment soared.

Defeats were inflicted without any decisive response from the unions, tied as they were to supporting "their" government. The FN?s growth was the direct consequence of the anti-working class policies of the Socialists and Communists, both in government and at the head of the unions. This was just the situation for the FN to grow amongst the unorganised and less class conscious workers as well as amongst the lower middle class and the unemployed. They used the old racist lie: immigration equals unemployment.

The FN was not alone in utilising racist demagogy over unemployment. In late 1980, the Communist mayor of Vitry took the controls of a bulldozer to close down an immigrant hostel. Around the same time, Robert Hue, currently the leader of the French Communist Party, led an "anti-drugs" campaign in his town which "just happened" to target immigrant families. Of course, the CP explained that its actions were all in the cause of anti-racism.

The FN?s major breakthrough came in the September 1983 local elections. Stirbois headed a list of FN candidates that got 16.7% of the vote in the recession-hit town of Dreux, where he had been building a base over a long period. The FN?s campaign was racist, playing on fears about crime and demanding repatriation. But it limited itself carefully to this law and order approach, calling for strong measures of state racism. In this sense it set the agenda for the "respectable racism" of the main bourgeois parties and gained admittance to the club.

In the second round of the elections, the Gaullist RPR party and Giscard?s UDF stood jointly with the FN on a single ticket. The right won 55.5% of the votes and Stirbois, along with other FN members, got in. Not
only did the FN succeed in winning council seats, it also won the recognition of the other right-wing parties as a respectable partner.

Almost overnight, Le Pen gained access to the mass media. Now at last he was free to spew his racial hatred into every living room on prime time television. Only a few months earlier he had written to Mitterrand to protest against media ?censorship? of the FN! 11

Despite his links with fascism in the past, despite his anti-semitism, none of which he renounced, Le Pen now aspired to be the outspoken voice of ?respectable racism?. Large sections of the petit bourgeoisie and even some sections of the working class were drawn to this monster. In the Euro elections of June 1984, the FN won nearly 11% with over 2,200,000 votes, taking it neck and neck with the Communist Party. No sooner had they arrived in the European Parliament than they formed a parliamentary group with the Italian neo-fascists of the MSI.12

Labour movement leaders actually pandered to this rise of organised racism. In June 1983, André Bergeron, leader of the Force Ouvrière trade union, declared that ?immigration levels have reached saturation point?.13 In early 1984, when immigrant workers at the Talbot-Poissy car plant dared to take on the bosses and their racist scab union, Socialist Party Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy called them ?striking ayatollahs?. Shortly afterwards he introduced a cynical policy that paid immigrants if they would return permanently to their country of origin.

Pursuing its new orientation, the FN did everything in its power to conceal the political aims of some of its leaders and members. In May 1985 an internal circular decreed that ?activists who are too extreme in their views are forbidden from speaking out?.14 At the same time, Mitterrand brought in proportional representation for the 1986 general election with the aim of securing more seats for the FN, thus embarrassing the traditional right.

The FN got 10% of the vote and 35 seats. In fact Mitterrand?s wretched tactic blew up in his face. Far from splitting under pressure from the FN, the right (along with the left), took up the open racism Le Pen had dared to pioneer. Henceforth, racism was good political coin across the political spectrum.

Composition of the FN
During this phase of rapid growth, the FN had to build itself in a more professional way. Stirbois, by now Le Pen?s right-hand man and the Front?s Secretary General, sharpened up the party?s electoral machine and oversaw the setting-up of a network of front organisations to carry the FN?s message to new sectors of the population.

The ?Cercle Entreprise Moderne et Liberté? was one such organisation. Led by André Dufraisse, a former staff-member in Doriot?s PPF who was until his death in March 1994 a member of the FN?s National Executive,15 its purpose was to obtain funds from the business community. Other circles targeted FN sympathisers in the health service, among small farmers, the arts and public transport. The FN even attempted to set up union cells among seamen in FO and inside the CGT on the Paris métro.16

The FN?s growth soon attracted the attention of other far-right organisations. The Parti des Forces Nouvelles (PFN), a fascist sect propped up by former members of Ordre Nouveau, joined just before the 1984 Euro-elections, strengthening the party?s fascist hard-core.

Le Pen?s espousal of ultra-Reaganite free-market economics meanwhile served to woo other reactionary non-fascist currents.17 Bruno Mégret?s Committee for Republican Action, linked to the Club de l?Horloge, was arguably the most important of these. It fused with the FN in 1985. Mégret had been a secretary in the
Throughout this phase, the FN’s unequivocal advocacy of the free market consistently gave it a head start over the traditional right. For a while it was able to pose as the main exponent of the Thatcherite/Reaganite economic ideas in France, opposed to traditional economic étatisme (state interventionism). In its 1985 programme the FN’s slogans included, ?Set business and the economy free? and ?Property is freedom?.

Such policies clashed sharply with the traditional fascist emphasis on the state and corporatism. They also flew in the face of Le Pen’s statement that ?if there is a human impulse toward harmony it must be codified and guided through the state?s authority?, for the state ?embodies the community that the people have organised in order to fulfill their destiny?.

There is a simple explanation for this glaring contradiction. The FN leadership?s aim was to build a mass organisation. The traditional Gaullist emphasis on the state, which all the French right-wing parties shared, compelled it to adopt a distinctive stance.

Le Pen himself was clearly impressed by the successes of free-market economics in the US and the UK, especially their ability to attract small employers. So he grafted monetarism onto his racist and nationalist ideology and blithely disregarded the ways in which it contradicted the ideas of most of his members, not to mention his own earlier statements.

Mégret, a racist with no scruples about working alongside fascists, rapidly crawled up the party hierarchy, winning a seat on the National Executive in a matter of months. As the leader of the national monetarists inside the party, he was to play a key role in persuading its fascist founders to commit themselves to the free market in all official documents. His success may be gauged by the fact that in June 1985, the party’s Nine Proposals to give French nationals preferential treatment in the job market, were copied, word for word, from a Club de l’Horloge document on unemployment.

In spite (or perhaps because) of their growing influence over economic policy, the arrivistes from the Club de l’Horloge failed to win stronger representation on the FN’s leading bodies. The fascists who founded the FN in 1972 had plainly decided to keep control. Of the 21 members elected to the National Executive in 1985, only three did not have long-standing, close links with the fascists.

At the same time, other fascists rallied to the FN. Here we might single out for special mention Michel Schneider, author of an Essay in Favour of Neo-Fascism and The Principles of Fascist Action, who became an adviser to Stirbois; and Bernard Antony, aka Romain Marie, whose meteoric rise brought him a seat on the National Executive and in the European Parliament. Antony, a serious fascist in the mould of the Spanish Falangists, was for many years associated with the innocuous-sounding Committees for Christian Solidarity movement.

As one might expect, the Committees were anything but innocuous. Antony saw them as an active, fighting cutting edge? which would fight for, among other things, the abolition of the current laws on trade union representation, Church control over education and an end to the genocide under anaesthetic of France and its people. He subsequently founded Présent, a clerical fascist daily paper with a wide distribution but a very small readership.

Nods and winks
The leadership believes that, with fascists of this calibre operating at every level of the organisation (not
just in the upper echelons), the party’s fascist core will not be weakened by the recruitment of half-baked racist populists.24

At regular intervals, nods and winks, towards the fascist cadre at all levels had to be given to prevent them becoming too restive at the long term concealment of open fascist policies. For example, in May 1984, Le Pen referred in passing to France’s living space and feigned amazement when it was put to him that he meant lebensraum (living space), the doctrine German Nazis claimed gave them the right to invade other countries.

Such references were used more often to feed the faithful their traditional diet of anti-semitism, negationism (the notion that the holocaust never happened) and assorted conspiracy theories. In November 1983 FN leader Arnaud de Lassus launched an attack on the Socialist/Communist Government in terms of the four superpowers colonising France today: Marxists, Freemasons, Jews and Protestants. And behold in the Cabinet: Fiterman, Hernu, Badinter and Rocard.? In September 1987 Le Pen declared that the question of the existence of the gas chambers was a detail of the history of the Second World War.

Despite its repulsive racism and chauvinism, the FN does not openly advocate the destruction of the workers’ movement or the establishment of a totalitarian system. Even more striking is the fact that it has rarely attempted to bring terror onto the streets as a party, for example by attacking its favourite scapegoat, immigrants. Until now the FN has confined itself to using intimidating racist language without carrying out attacks as a party. This is not to ignore or minimise the fact that there are a horrific number of attacks and racist crimes that the FN has influenced others to carry out or that have been perpetrated by individual FN members.

Why such official reticence? Partly due to the fact that many of its voters would withdraw support if the FN launched a campaign of terror in its own name. It also reflects the fact that the bosses are not faced with a revolutionary social movement of workers which fascists might save them from. The misleadership of the unions and workers’ parties, aggravated by 13 years of Socialist rule, has created a situation in which, for the moment at least, there is neither the need nor the mass support for a fascist movement. In such circumstances the FN remains a fascist front, dependent for electoral support on people who would not accept the ideas of a large section of the leadership.

**The FN’s fascist turn**

At the 1988 presidential elections Le Pen turned in his best ever electoral performance: 14.4% of all votes cast, or 4,375,000 votes. This marked the beginning of a subtle change in the FN’s politics.

The FN found that it was systematically excluded from all power. The two round system that Chirac’s government brought back for the parliamentary elections inevitably worked against the FN. Unable to reach agreement with the conservative parties, Le Pen and his cronies had to endure the spectacle of Charles Pasqua appealing directly to FN voters. On essentials, we share the same values, Pasqua said in April 1988. The FN was caught in a dead end at the moment of its greatest electoral glory. Its vote held up in the June 1988 parliamentary elections at a comparable level to 1986, but it failed to win seats.25 Racism, populism and the free market were no longer enough.

The FN hardened its tone, with references to the fascist past becoming more frequent. On 1 May 1988 it organised its first ever Paris May Day demonstration. Apart from being a two-finger sign to the workers’ movement, it was used as a reminder that Vichy was the first government to institute a bank holiday on May Day. Then Le Pen accused the conservative parties of being in cahoots with an alleged Jewish lobby?. He marked the new parliamentary session with a piece of foul word-play on the name of the
A few months later Le Pen wrote an article in Présent attacking ?forces preaching an ideology of world unity?:

?There are the Freemasons. I believe the Trilateral plays a role. The big internationals like the Jewish International have played a not inconsiderable role in reinforcing this anti-national mood.?27

To accompany this hardening of tone, Le Pen?s company, SERP, decided to come into the modern age. Founded by Le Pen and his friend Gaultier (a veteran of the Vichy Militia and the SS), the SERP caused a stir during the 1960s for distributing records of pro-Hitler songs.28 At the end of the 1980s it began to distribute videos such as ?Sieg in Western? (a Nazi film made in 1940) and ?Die Volksführer Léon Degrelle? (in praise of the Belgian fascist leader).29

The ?50 Proposals? on immigration unveiled by Mégret in November 1991 indicate the depth of the FN?s racism. In what amounted to a manifesto for apartheid, the party spelled out more brazenly than ever how it proposed to treat immigrants. There would be ?preferential treatment for French people in employment, housing and social welfare benefits?; ?unemployed immigrants who overstay their visas? would be ?hunted down?; ?necessary expulsion procedures [would be] put into action?; there would be ?quotas in schools?; immigrant hostels would be closed down and immigrant areas ?dismantled?.

Once more the response of the other parties, left as well as right, was to try to prove that they could implement what the FN?s racist voters were looking for. The Socialist government set up detention centres near sea-ports and airports to imprison immigrants awaiting expulsion (thus implementing proposal 46 on the FN?s list) and chartered airplanes to repatriate them (FN Proposal 47). The Communist Party launched a petition against illegal immigration (FN Proposal 44). Once the right took control of parliament again the law on nationality was changed (FN Proposal 8), there was no automatic right to citizenship (FN Proposal 9) and ?stop-and-search? powers were granted to the police (FN Proposal 50).

The FN began to wonder how to counter the situation where the other parties were stealing its racist clothes. After the 1989 European Elections, Roland Gaucher, National Executive member and leader of Déat?s war-time fascist Rassemblement National Populaire, bewailed the fact that the party ?had not made enough of an effort in the direction of workers. I for my part have never been too keen on monetarism?.30 It should be borne in mind that the FN?s vote had just dropped by two million as compared to the 1988 presidential elections.

The FN had a rethink on its economic policies and bit by bit abandoned the free-market policies of the 1980s. To some extent this process was forced upon it by the Maastricht and GATT treaties, both of which were based on monetarist principles but had an unmistakably ?anti-national? logic. Carl Lang, the FN?s new General Secretary, declared in 1991 that:

?We must make a very special effort on social solidarity?.31

In March 1992, Mégret unveiled a 51-point programme on social and economic policy. The apartheid policies of the 50 measures were, unsurprisingly, carried over into this new document; but free market economics were abandoned to be replaced by a covert form of corporatism.

Free enterprise, the FN said, ?should cease to be a place of struggle between employers and workers, as
Marxists claim? but should ?instead become an authentic community of work where everybody, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy, has a place.?32 Measures the FN had once considered ?socialist? and therefore the root of all evil, such as the minimum wage, maternity leave, or extended holiday pay, were taken up by a party that had become worried about its credibility amongst the poorer layers of society.

A few months later an official explanation of the FN?s new world vision appeared in its ?theoretical? journal Identité, laying claim to the ?anti-capitalist? (in fact anti-semitic) legacy of the Nazis:

?The spirit of cosmopolitanism along with its nationless corollary, anonymous nationless capitalism, undermines the fabric of society and the economy. Far from bringing prosperity, it causes unemployment and poverty throughout the world . . . Economic questions can no longer be debated in terms of Keynesianism versus monetarism or collectivism versus capitalism, but between a global concept of the economy and a national concept, between unbridled speculative capitalism and industrial, community-minded capitalism. These two world-views are radically opposed.?33

These changes were ratified at the November 1992 Convention in Nice. According to the new economic programme, employers ?are not free to act as they wish, but are subordinate to the people?.34 Although denationalisation was still advocated, the party made a new call for protectionist tariffs.

From the early 1990s, monetarism became a favourite target of FN leaders. Mégret explained that ?free market economism is close to cosmopolitanism.?35 Pierre Vial, the ?negationist? historian who had once wanted to simply abolish income tax, claimed:

?I?m anti-free market, and I?m at least as concerned about social rights as I am about national ones.?36 Le Pen voiced his opinion that ?the causes of unemployment are immigration, excessive taxes and the free movement of currencies.?37

By means of this great leap backwards, the FN was able to move closer to the roots of fascism, where ?nationalism? and ?socialism? sit side by side.

Until then it had avoided all physical confrontation with the left. Now it was showing its muscle. The fascist organisation, Troisième Voie, was asked for help stewarding a meeting Le Pen was to speak at in Chartres, following a series of confrontations with anti-fascists from the area. Faced with a large counter-demonstration, the fascists decided to attack. The anti-fascists were not equipped to defend themselves and the fascists routed them.

The FN also set about creating a fascist movement among students. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Paris universities were the scene of violent confrontations between fascists and the left (Le Pen was an enthusiastic participant in these38). The FN reforged links with the fascist GUD and started the REP which carried out attacks on left-wing students, notably on central Parisian campuses (the Sorbonne, Jussieu and Assas). In Autumn 1994, two members of the FN?s youth section in Montpellier fired on students who were tearing down FN posters.

In October 1992, in a speech to the Nice conference marked by a frankness that would have been unthinkable a few years ago, Le Pen gave a hint of how he sees the future: ?We must respect legality while it exists . . . We?re an army in civvies, but it would not be right for us to go around parading arms today . . . If you?ve got a firearms license, choose a 9 mm in preference to the 6.35 mm, it?s more effective.?39

But the factor which affected the FN?s standing most during this phase was Le Pen?s handling of his party?s line on the Gulf War. The FN owes most of its electoral success to anti-Arab racism. The Gulf War
should, therefore, have been a godsend. Yet the FN decided not to support the reactionary war of the US and its allies but instead supported Saddam Hussein.

The reasons for this highly unpopular decision (and it was unpopular even inside the FN) were thoroughly ideological. The choice was between the destruction of an ?Arab enemy? and the chance to support a possible attack against Israel. The FN, true to its anti-semitic reflexes, fell in behind Saddam.

Anti-semitism is not synonymous with fascism despite its historic centrality to pseudo-scientific racist ?theory?. Not all racists are anti-semites. Indeed the standard racist agitation of the FN was not anti-semitism but anti-Arabism. But opposition to a war involving French forces against an Arab country was more than a wink to fascist elements who hoped to see Saddam Hussein smash Israel. It was also a way of testing whether the electorate might welcome such a turn. The fact that the bulk of the FN leadership stood out against the Gulf War, exposing their patriotism to question, indicates the depth of their commitment to fascist and anti-semitic ideals.

The results of this experiment were disastrous for the FN. Some of the movement?s notables, such as Pierre Sergent, a former OAS man and a close friend of Le Pen, publicly criticised the FN?s failure to support the French Army and came out on the Israeli side. Le Pen disappeared from the media and plummeted in the opinion polls. The electoral bubble had burst.

The return of the right

Although the FN flourished during the first period of ?cohabitation? between a Socialist president and a conservative parliament, in 1986-1988, the right?s victory in the parliamentary elections of March 1993 had a very different effect. Even before the elections, at the 1992 Maastricht referendum, Le Pen had to put up with Pasqua and Séguin stealing his clothes. A large section of the FN?s voters were seduced by the future Interior Minister?s nationalist turn of phrase. These voters preferred the ?respectable? racist right to a party tainted with fascism.

The June 1994 Euro-elections marked a watershed in the FN?s history. Not so much because it won fewer votes than in 1989 ? 10. 6% (2,038,843) compared with 11.7% in 1989 ? as because of the rise of Phillippe de Villiers, who won the support of a considerable number of Le Pen voters, taking him ahead of the FN. De Villiers is made of the same racist, nationalist mettle as Mégret, but behaved throughout the Maastricht campaign in a manner more typical of Pasqua or Séguin. He has made himself a ?respectable? option for those dithering over whether to vote for Le Pen. During the April 1995 Presidential election he will be in direct competition for many of Le Pen?s voters; it seems probable that the FN will not repeat its terrifying four million votes of 1988.

The FN today is stagnating. Its share of the vote is declining. Although opinion polls show 35% of the population agreeing with its policies on immigration, 87% regard it as sectarian and racist and 73% think it is a threat to democracy. Support is clearly falling compared with previous years. Even if it can boast around a thousand local government seats, it does not control any town with over 10,000 inhabitants. It has certainly put down roots, but its growth has stopped.

FN activists are well aware of this. At the FN?s Ninth Conference (February 1994) differences between fascists and nationalists broke out into the open. Tendencies were openly formed for the first time so that different slates could be put forward for the Central Committee. Le Pen publicly condemned what he saw as ?clan manoeuvres? but still failed to get his own way. The crunch came when he asked for backing for J-M. Dubois, a personal friend and the president of the Modern Business and Freedom circle. Dubois is Le Pen?s passport to the business world. A vote against him was in effect a vote against the leader. He was not elected so Le Pen simply co-opted him onto the Central Committee and the National Executive.
In the same way, he appointed Bruno Gollnisch as party vice-president. His short-term aim here was to counter the authority of Mégret (Delegate General) and Carl Lang (General Secretary) but he may also view Gollnisch as a possible successor.

Gollnisch is a Professor at the University of Lyons-III whose popularity with Le Pen may owe something to his reverence for Vichy, his enthusiasm for Vladimir Zhirinovski and revisionist ideas on the holocaust. His promotion is a clear indication that Le Pen (whose authority is not in doubt for the moment) is out to weaken Mégret and the ?softer? wing of the party and strengthen those elements closest to his own heart, the pro-Vichy, pro-Hitler, anti-semitic elements.

**Where now for the FN?**

The FN presently finds itself in a dilemma. A large chunk of its vote is defecting to the traditional right-wing parties who have shown they can match the FN for racism, chauvinism and reaction. At the same time, any move further to the right would cause an even greater electoral haemorrhage. Le Pen is still in control of the organisation but is having difficulties maintaining a balance. Already he is being openly criticised by the Catholic fundamentalist-fascist wing of the FN around Bernard Antony for refusing to call for the abolition of the right of abortion, or even to support anti-abortion commandos.

It seems unlikely that things can go on in this way for much longer. The conflict in the leadership could soon engulf the whole organisation. After the Presidential election, those seeking power by parliamentary means will be increasingly tempted by possible alliances with sections of the traditional right, ideally with De Villiers or Pasqua.

On the other hand both top leaders and cadres who are frustrated by the lack of electoral progress in recent years and who fear that all their gains are being eroded, may decide the only way to consolidate the party is through street mobilisations. They will be increasingly tempted to break with the party?s ?soft? wing and present the FN as a party struggling for power by direct action.

The formal end of the recession has brought no ?feel good factor? to France. When and if recovery makes itself felt, mass unemployment is not going to disappear. In recent years a new, politically conscious layer of youth has emerged. As yet it has little contact with the workers? movement. Despite this, and despite the weakness of the unions, these youth could bring about revolutionary explosions in every European imperialist country.

But these same conditions could also provide a breeding ground for fascists, if the workers? movement fails to embrace a revolutionary solution. In such circumstances, the FN (or a section of it) could well resort to openly fascist methods to recruit disillusioned or disoriented youth.

This is why the fight against the FN and its ideas is of central importance for the workers? movement and for youth. We have seen how the FN has been able to infect the workers? movement with racism. We have seen how a section of the leadership aims to create a mass fascist party. Today, we can stop the FN in its tracks, provided we are clear about how to do so.

What is needed to stop the rise of the FN, the propagation of its racist ideas and its transformation into a fascist party, is a revival in workers? confidence. The slight increase in struggles of late, the mobilisation of youth against the minimum wage last Spring, can be built on. They must become a beacon for permanent change, a bastion of resistance to racist ideas. And they must be capable of mobilising the youth and the unemployed.

We have to be prepared to fight the FN on all fronts. The recent experiments in thuggery are a reminder
that a fascist party cannot be built without street mobilisations. The natural fodder for such mobilisations are the unemployed and the most despairing elements of society. Steps must be taken immediately to prevent that from happening.

Every demonstration and every meeting of the FN should be countered by mass mobilisations of workers, youth, immigrants and the unemployed, with the aim of destroying the FN. To do this we need to build a mass anti-fascist united front of workers and youth that can counter the racist lies and help politically destroy the FN, as well as organise militant and accountable workers? defence squads to physically smash the FN.

Since the last war, no mass fascist party has been able to take root in France. After ten years at the centre of French politics, the FN has prepared the ground for such an organisation. In the coming years a mass fascist party is possible. It is up to us to make sure that the possibility is not turned into reality.

Endnotes
2 Quoted in Le Pen, Le Vrai, p73. The speech was delivered on 2 April 1989 at a meeting commemorating the fascists? victory in the Spanish Civil War.
4 Quoted by G. Bresson and C. Lionet, Le Pen (Seuil, 1994). p200
5 This group withdrew from the FN in 1987, claiming Le Pen had become ?putty in the hands of the Zionists?! (See Le Pen, Le Vrai, p41)
6 Le Pen, Le Vrai, p40.
9 Quoted in Le Pen, Le Vrai , p.37.
10 Some claim that the FN is in large measure the creation of the Socialist Party in general and Mitterrand in particular. See for example E Faux, T Legrand and G Perez, La Main droite de Dieu Seuil, 1994
11 Faux, Legrand and Perez highlight Mitterrand?s support for Le Pen and the way he put pressure on television stations to let Le Pen appear on the small screen.
12 Today?s MSI, anxious to prove itself as a respectable party, refuses to sit with the FN!
14 Birenbaum, op cit p. 67.
15 For further details, see Blandine Hennion, Le Front national, l?argent et l?establishment. La Découverte, 1993.
16 See Plenel and Rollat, op cit, for a critical discussion of the FN?s involvement. The FN has the ear of some prison officers? and police associations. It does not appear to have made any inroads into the rest of the labour movement.
17 Le Pen appears to have been inspired by the US Republican Party?s 1984 convention. See Le Pen, Le Vrai, p73.
19 Quoted by Plenel and Rollat, op cit, p. 193.
20 This is not to say that there was ever a Chinese wall between fascists and national monetarists inside the FN. Many were won to fascism after they joined.
21 Birenbaum, p. 67.
22 Ibid, p. 84.
24 At the FN?s 1991 Conference held in Nice, 39% of all delegates were long-time political activists. 22%
had belonged to the Tixier-Vignancour Committees, 13% were ex-members of Occident or Ordre Nouveau and 8% had been in the PFN. Thus a large section of the membership base has a clear fascist past.

25 The only candidate to take a seat was the late Yann Piat who left the FN a few months later.

26 In the row that ensued, some non-fascist high-profile members saw their chance to sever ties with the FN, among them Yann Piat.

27 Plenel and Rollat, p. 53.

28 Le Pen wrote a sleeve-note for the record in which he claimed Hitler?s movement ?was popular and democratic at the end of the day?. As a result, he was charged and convicted in 1971 with ?apologising for war crimes?. See Le Pen, Le Vrai, p52.

29 Ibid.

30 Birenbaum, op cit p.175.

31 Vander Velpen, op cit p.77.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid, p.79.

34 Hennion, op cit p.103.

35 Le Pen, Le Vrai, p. 95.

36 Ibid.


38 For an account of these, see Le Pen, Le Vrai.

39 Plenel and Rollat, p.47. The FN?s Member?s Guide says that ?committed members must bear in mind that one day it may be necessary to use weapons.? See Velpen, op cit p. 85.

40 Le Monde, 3 September 1990


42 Dubois is a former Gaullist-party member who now holds elected office on behalf of the FN. He believes that belonging to the French section of the SS ?means nothing?.

43 From 1991 Le Pen began appointing elements of both wings of the party to the leadership to fend off challenges. In fact this method only strengthened Mégret and those elements least committed to fascism. Lang, successor to Stirbois, is a case in point. Since becoming General Secretary he has altered the party machine by removing 29 constituency secretaries installed by Stirbois.

44 The expulsion of Le Pen?s adviser Saint-Affrique shows just how explosive the situation is. At the FN?s 1994 summer school Saint-Affrique denounced the presence of fascists (in Mégret?s entourage)! To the delight of the press he was immediately and publicly expelled by Mégret, with Le Pen?s eventual approval

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