

Some clichés and preconceived ideas about the National Front

* Is the National Front against the “system”? Is it “neither a leftwing nor a rightwing” party?

Actually, during most of its history, the National Front’s main leader has had discreet contacts and negotiations with most leaders of the Right from Chirac to Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (both presidents of the Republic), to Charles Pasqua, minister of Interior. Jean-Marie Le Pen has often negotiated on a national, or on a local level, with the Right. It has recruited old-style right-wing politicians often asking them to pay their entry inside the National Front. During several years, the National Front has been financed by the Moon sect, helped by hundreds of its militants, etc. So the National Front can in no way be considered as an “anti-system” party, even if, like the French fascists of the 1930s, it pretends to be “neither Right nor Left.” Not to mention the fact that this party strongly depends on French state generous financing system for all the elections and on the personal wealth of its leader. Jean-Marie Le Pen has organized all sorts of dubious speculative maneuvers with the National Front members’ money and, for this purpose, he created a personal company¹ (COTELEC). He also hijacked the inheritance of an ageing, alcoholic, mythomaniac fascist capitalist (Hubert Lambert). So it’s obvious that Jean-Marie Le Pen, his (first and second) wives and daughters belong to the bourgeoisie, given their social status, properties, material privileges inside their own party, etc.

* Is the National Front more anti-Muslim than anti-Jewish?

Obviously, according to the periods and the varying influence of fascists active inside the National Front, at the local level, but also in its leadership, this has varied. Since 2011, when Marine Le Pen became the President of the National Front, official, public, anti-Semitism has publicly diminished. Marine Le Pen has tried several times to pay an official visit to Israel; she contacted leaders of the American Jewish community, etc. But when one reads testimonies about local militants and cadres and what they say in internal meetings, it does not seem anti-Semitism has disappeared from the National Front. It’s just forbidden to publicly express anti-Jewish feelings on Facebook, on local National Front websites, in public meetings or press conferences, etc.

* According to Wikipedia in English “*the National Front was a neofascist party which did not really want to take power through elections and alliances with the republican Right. The new National Front has abandoned any hope to seize power by force and has now become a “center-right” party*” This analysis is a bit too rapid!

The National Front’s program and strategy have known many twists and turns. Obviously, in the short term, if any mass fascist party appears in France it will most certainly come from a fraction of the present National Front. For the moment, Marine Le Pen is trying to operate the same kind of political mutation Fini did when he transformed the Italian neofascist MSI into Aleanza Nazionale.

Even if many fascist groups criticize the National Front for being too moderate, “Zionist” or “pro-American,” they still have very good friends and allies inside the National Front, as was shown, for example, during the mass demonstrations organized in 2013 against the gay marriage.

* Is the National Front the “first working class party” in France? It does not control any trade union, or any fraction in any trade union, even if it has trade-unionists in its ranks. It does not organize a significant, militant, youth organization. It does not play any role in the strikes or struggles for better living standards in working class suburbs. It’s not able for the moment to control whole sections of the territory as French social-democracy and later Communist party did. So we should obviously be preoccupied by its growing electoral and ideological influence (for example, its electoral results encouraged the “Republican” Right to adopt part of its agenda on migration, “insecurity” and Islam) but we should not panic or become paralyzed by the National Front.

* Is the National Front constantly progressing since its foundation in 1972? If we look both at its electoral results and its number of membership cards the picture is more complex. In 1972, it had around 2,000 sympathizers, but ten years later (1982 and 1983) less than 250. Its membership started to rise in 1984, thanks to the ~~sat~~television channel which invited Jean-Marie Le Pen incited by Mitterrand who gave a little push to Le Pen in the name of democracy. It reached 20,000 card holders in 1989 and 42,000 in 1998 just before the split between Mégret and Le Pen. Then it went down (12,800 in 2000) and started to go up again only ten years later, in 2010 (20,000); since then, the progression has been

¹ Marine Le Pen followed her father’s steps by creating “Jeanne,” a structure designed to collect money aside from the party. Twenty of her closest collaborators and friends are now expecting a trial for their financial manipulations and illegal use of the European Union’s electoral funds.

impressive and permanent: 46,868 (according to other sources 34,000) members in 2011 and 74,000 in 2013.

Now, if we consider its electoral results, they do not coincide exactly with its ups and downs in terms of (supposed) membership. This is linked to the special relationship between the voters, the party and its leader (Jean-Marie Le Pen, and now Marine Le Pen). Therefore the National Front always got better results at presidential election campaigns which correspond more to its authoritarian nature, regrouped around a beloved Leader, who has always put forward his name, promoting his face (even his eye-patch during some years) and his body on all electoral posters, often not even mentioning his party's name. And his daughter follows exactly the same path, promoting herself much more than her party. This attitude is both a product of Le Pen's neofascist values and of French presidential system, itself influenced by modern marketization techniques which sell politicians to voters the same way they sell cars to consumers.

*** Is the National Front a racist party like the Nazi party?**

Most voters, especially in working-class areas, pretend not to be racist. They say they have Arab or African friends (which is sometimes true) but explicitly express their hate against travellers, Roma, and Romanians. They explain their vote for the National Front as a simple "protest vote" (a convenient explanation propagated by the media); they think Marine Le Pen is very different from her racist and anti-Semitic father, or they sometimes use a "democratic argument": "After all, they deserve also to have their chance and prove what they are able to do."

The cadres of the National Front have an absurd defence system: *"We are neither racists nor anti-Semites. But it's normal to discriminate. Let's take a very simple example: a man falls in love with a woman, he discriminates the other women. The same in a restaurant, when you choose a dish, you discriminate the dishes you do not order."* And nobody laughs when a cadre holds such stupid "reasonings" in a National Front meeting.

Le Pen, as bizarre as it may sound, has never been a 100% racist in the Nazi sense, a supporter of a totally "white" France, even if he recently made a Nazi "joke" about how the Ebola virus could solve Africa's problems; he has always made racist statements² to get the attention of the press, to keep his fascist supporters inside the Front and to embarrass the members of his party who wanted to make alliances with the "respectable" Right. He is one of those Far-Right politicians who have participated in French colonial wars and learned to "appreciate" (in a very paternalistic-racist way obviously) the Arab, Asian and African auxiliaries of French Army. The National Front always tried to present itself as the best friend of the *harkis*³, especially before every election, even if the majority of them vote more for the Right than for the Far Right.

Le Pen has always defended an "assimilationist" line, not the deportation or imprisonment of every person who is not Franco-French; in other words, Le Pen likes "good" migrants who are working hard and great patriots, but he does not want "too much" of them on the French soil.

On this point, he has repeatedly fought against those who wanted no Franco-Arabs or Franco-Africans in the National Front, especially in the leadership or as National Front candidates. This may explain why Le Pen can be seen by some Franco-Maghrebian or West Indian workers, or by some migrants as not so racist... And his friendship with Franco-African stand-up comedian Dieudonné has certainly helped him to soften his image as a racist.

Everybody knows that Sarkozy, when he was the minister of Interior, went in 2005 to visit La Courneuve, where a young boy was killed by a stray gunshot. This day, he declared this district would be "cleaned out with a Kärcher" – meaning all criminals should be removed. Later, he used the word "scumbags" to qualify those who booed him in Argenteuil, another Parisian suburb. But few people know that Jean-Marie Le Pen gave a very short press conference (30 minutes – Le Pen is brave but not foolhardy) in Argenteuil, in 2007, and declared: *"If some people want to karcherize you to exclude you, we want to help you to get out of these suburban ghettos where French politicians have trapped you to qualify you afterwards as scumbags."* *"You are neither our 'potes [pals]' nor Blacks nor Beurs [Arabs], you are French citizens, the legitimate children of France, you are part of the Republic, you have the same rights as all of us."* This declaration followed his 2006 speech at Valmy directed to the "French people of foreign origin."

Therefore, Alain Soral, at that time member of the Central Committee of the National Front, created in 2007 an association, "Egalité et Réconciliation," in order to convince Franco-Maghrebian people that "national preference" policy was not directed against them. A difficult task obviously but he was (and is) not totally unsuccessful. He obviously had in mind recruiting among some Franco-Maghrebians, so that the National Front would not be labelled anymore as racist.

This obviously seems incredible to believe, given Le Pen's repeated declarations about racial inequality, but we must admit his double language works sometimes, including with people who should normally consider him as a racist. So, if the National Front is not a Nazi party, it's certainly not a "center-right" party either, like Wikipedia pretends!

*** Is the National Front gaining influence among Franco-Africans, Franco-Asians, and Franco-Maghrebians in France?**

To start with, foreigners who get work and stay permits become sometimes a bit xenophobic or behave like Uncle Toms, spreading French nationalism as soon as they get their papers. "Yes there are too many foreigners in France" (generally

² "Blacks have more talent for dancing or sports than Whites."

³ This word designates soldiers who voluntarily (or not) helped French Army in Algeria, repatriated French Muslims and their descendants.

⁴ *"Touche pas à mon pote"* (Don't touch my pal) was a slogan of the antiracist movement SOS Racisme sponsored and manipulated by the Left government and Socialist Party in 1984 and afterwards.

that's what Algerians would say about Malians, Chinese about Moroccans, Turks about Senegalese, etc.). French nationalism is quite strong in the media, and even more when the Right is in power.

Among the French descendants of Maghrebian, African, Chinese or Turkish parents, and among migrants who have a work and stay permit, their political views depend very much on their level of social integration. You can find Chinese (or Franco-Chinese) or Algerian (or Franco-Algerians) small businessmen or small executives who have a right-wing, Reaganian attitude and say horrible things about "foreigners" ... i.e. their own parents!!! Some of these people could vote for the National Front, but I'm not sure it's a massive phenomenon.

You also have those who are at the bottom of the social ladder. They are torn between:

- their will to be "integrated" in French society at all costs (like their friends and neighbours of the same origin who have succeeded to have a good job, move to a better district, etc.)

- and the (hard or soft) racist reactions they often get from the Franco-French or the hidden institutional racism which impregnates French society.

For those who are at the bottom of the social scale, religion is obviously an efficient way to shape a stronger identity, generally a Muslim identity. I doubt this kind of people can be attracted by the National Front because this party, for the moment, prefers to court Jewish religious reactionaries than Muslim ones. But it can change, and in this case the National Front would depart even more from the classic fascist model of the 1930s...

In a society where multiculturalism is officially praised, it's probably easier to define oneself first by one's national origin, than in a national-republican society like France. Therefore it's more the poorest migrants or descendants of migrants who give priority to their religious and/or ethnic origins.

The "Bac + 5" (those who have studied several years after high school) know that, to succeed in French society, they must be proud to be French and put aside their religious/ethnic origins. Because, for the moment, there is no real room for multiculturalism in the French elites...

There is also another solution, at least for those who have enough money or a good business project financed by their family: becoming a successful businessman; in this case, their social success is not built on their diplomas, on the acceptance of the Franco-French hierarchy inside the companies or the state. They can free themselves of all national-republican ideas and be proud of their origins. This model is not widespread but it will grow.

So about the National Front influence among Franco-Africans and Franco-Asians, if this xenophobic party is really able to change and to do what it pretends, it may attract not only Franco-French but also people of other origins. But, in the long term, this would lead to a split or a massive purge inside the National Front. I'm not sure Marine Le Pen is able to do it because her father controls all the money⁵. It's not only a psychological problem but also a financial one. Such an open policy would need a split. And will the young ex-fascists who are today her close collaborators appreciate such "openness" towards a massive arrival of Franco-Arabs or Franco-Africans inside the party?

Not to mention the fact the Rassemblement Bleu Marine (an ad hoc organization built outside the National Front around Marine Le Pen) includes groups which are really anti-Muslim. I'm sure they would not like to see too much "Arabs" in their meetings...

*** Has the National Front become "gay-friendly" like the Dutch far-right populist Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders?** Several close collaborators of Marine Le Pen are gay and even more important Steve Briois, the exemplary National Front mayor of Hénin-Beaumont, is apparently gay, even if he did not do his "coming out" yet. Marine Le Pen has supported all his political battles and visited dozens of times his town during the last five years (she tried to be elected several times in this region). That may explain why she did not participate in the big demonstrations against gay marriage. Let's recall Jean-Marie Le Pen considers homosexuality as a "devious attitude"...

Marine Le Pen uses the fears of Islam propagated in the gay community to attack all the believers of this religion in an insidious way. Islamic fundamentalism appears as a danger to the homosexuals and lesbians and when Marine Le Pen declared "it's not easy to be homosexual in certain districts," she was clearly targeting working class suburbs which include a high proportion of people coming from the Maghreb and who are supposedly "Muslim."

*** Why and when does Marine Le Pen use "Left" values?** She always does it to attack Islam and Muslims: the National Front "defends" women to denounce the way they are treated in the Arabic Gulf; she "defends" Jews to explain anti-Semitism is popular among Arabs and Muslims living in France and she "defends" gays to attack Islam for its homophobia.

*** Is the National Front a party which ignores the youth, including young workers?** No. Contrary to the Far Right policy until the end of 1990s, the new National Front young leaders have tried to express more tolerant views towards rap and (what they call) "musiques métissées" (meaning racially mixed musics). French youth today do not trust Left and Right politicians, they are often not interested in political programs on television or discussing politics among

⁵ She created a second structure, called Jeanne, to become financially independent from her father and in order to collect money on her own, but Jeanne and twenty of Marine Le Pen's close friends and collaborators are presently (May 2017) investigated by French judges. So we shall see if she succeeds to continue her financial maneuvers without being caught.

themselves. By presenting many young candidates at local elections in March 2014, Marine Le Pen has tried and apparently succeeded to attract part of the youth, including the working class youth, partly because the other Parties (including the Left and Far Left) mostly present candidates who are over 40 years old. Thus she sent a message: the National Front is able to change things now. Marion Maréchal Le Pen, 22 years old, is today the youngest MP of French Parliament.