

Report from Paris by Christine Bierre

Who will 'exorcise' French fascism?

While Le Pen's racism is no surprise to anyone, the new outbreak of xenophobia is not confined to his party.

The government's attack against illegal immigrant workers who were on a hunger strike at the St. Bernard Church in Paris on Aug. 23, has led to a wild radicalization of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, which is attempting to outdo the government. The attack on the immigrants was part of a scheme on the part of President Jacques Chirac's party, the RPR, to win over some of the fascist Le Pen's electoral base.

After having tried for many years to give himself a respectable "non-fascist" cover, Le Pen has suddenly dropped his mask and twice declared that he rejects the notion of equality of races. "In 1,500 years of history, France has shown how superior her civilization is," he raved at his movement's summer cadre school. "The theory of racial equality is absurd. I believe in racial inequality. All of history proves it: Other races do not have the same capacity for evolution."

While the National Front leader had organized a mass movement on the basis of xenophobic anti-immigrant propaganda, this is the first time that he has publicly embraced racialist theories.

The murder of a white French adolescent in Marseilles by a French youth of Moroccan origin, has given the National Front further impetus to intensify its racist rantings. On Sept. 14, when the youth was buried, the National Front organized a demonstration in Marseilles, to protest against "illegal immigration." "Whether we like it or not, the young murderer is not French, [but] Moroc-

can, like his father and mother," said Le Pen, in a blood-and-soil outburst.

Ironically, Le Pen pronounced those words not long before judges announced the closing down of the investigation into the murder of French Deputy Yann Piat. This murder has never been solved, but much evidence points to the fact that "personalities" of the majority political parties in the Parliament were involved. Not only do French mafias kill, but sometimes the murderers operate at the highest levels of the state.

Feeling that time is on his side, Le Pen called on his youth cadre to "prepare for the upcoming revolution." "Only the National Front can pull the country away from decadence," he said, warning of an upcoming crisis. "There is a moment when all this will collapse, and then, there will be a revolution. The extreme left is preparing itself with the means familiar to them. . . . So, I think that you should also prepare yourselves, because at some point, the corrupted structures of our system will collapse." Le Pen called for people to take their destiny into their own hands, against the "decadent and impotent state"

The worst, however, is the stupidity of elements of the Paris nomenclature, right and left, who would like to "exorcise" Le Pen by doing some of his dirty work themselves.

Prime Minister Alain Juppé recently announced that he is considering a reform of the electoral law. To counter expected breakthroughs by the National Front in the 1998 legisla-

tive elections, to the detriment of the other right-wing parties, Juppé's government is proposing to introduce a small dose of proportional voting, which would favor the election of a limited number of National Front candidates.

At it currently stands, deputies are elected in a two-round majority system: The first round eliminates all but two candidates, who then fight it out in the second round. There is only one exception to this rule: A third party which gets 10% of the vote, also participates in the second round. So long as there was no strong third party, generally only two candidates ran in the second round. But the expansion of Le Pen's party changes this.

To support Juppé's idea, the daily *Libération* gave publicity to a poll claiming that 63% of Frenchmen are shocked by Le Pen's recent statements; 51% agree with him on some issues, however, and believe that his party should have national representation. "This reform," wrote Serge July in an editorial on Sept. 16, "gives parliamentary representation to the voters of the National Front. It is necessary to go through this paradoxical situation, in order to exorcise the National Front."

In a similar vein, RPR Deputy Robert Pandraud declared that "it is preferable to have them [the National Front members] express themselves in the National Assembly, than in the streets."

While such short-sighted tactics might have "paid off" in periods of relative stability, today, as France hovers on the verge of a deep social, political, and economic crisis, this radicalization of the political debate could lead the country into a virtual civil war. In the meantime, it deflects all meaningful discussion about the real economic and social problems of the country, and what might be done to solve them.