

Le Pen and the Rise of the Front National

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Marine & Jean-Marie Le Pen

The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters. – Antonio Gramsci

In 2002, France and the world were shocked as Jean-Marie Le Pen received seventeen percent of the popular vote and entered the second round of the French presidential elections. The following day, protests erupted on the streets of France, with tens of thousands of people showing their opposition to the ultra-nationalist and anti-Semitic candidate. One week later, the May Day demonstrations in France involved one million people. The chants of the protestors were clear: no to fascism.

Breaking tradition, the centre-right Chirac refused a one-on-one debate with his opponent in the second round. He recognised that ‘faced with intolerance and hatred, no debate is possible’.¹ Although he may have also been keen to avoid being confronted with the controversy surrounding his own corruption, Chirac insisted that this was a principled stand against Le Pen’s racist hatred. Other political parties across the spectrum rallied around Chirac, despite their open disagreement with his politics, in

unity against the fascist threat. There were no illusions in Chirac, however, as the popular slogan which dominated the two-week election campaign became ‘Better a Crook than a Fascist’. Chirac won with the largest landslide in French presidential history with over 82% of the vote.

Jean-Marie Le Pen has been accused of involvement in torture when he was a paratrooper in Algeria during the War of Independence. He has unsuccessfully pursued court cases against the numerous publications who have published these allegations. An amnesty in France on war crimes committed in the Algerian War means Le Pen cannot be prosecuted.

He has been fined on multiple occasions for his comments on French involvement in the Nazi regime, participating in Holocaust denial, recording Nazi war songs, and repeatedly describing gas chambers as a ‘detail’ of history over his several decades of public life. He has also been fined for inciting racial hatred due to his views on Muslims.

Frequenting far-right meetings, Le Pen would often become involved in street brawls with communists. These fights are proudly cited as the reason for the damage to his eyes, one of which has now lost its sight. In 1997, he assaulted Socialist candidate Annette Peulvast-Bergeal, leading to his suspension from the European parliament.

The Front National was formed in France in 1972 by supporters of the Vichy regime (including members of the Waffen SS), monarchists, fascists, traditionalist Catholics and other members of the anti-communist right. These included members of the defunct *Parti Populaire Français* who infamously collaborated with the Nazi occupiers in the raffle in 1942 where thirteen thousand Jews were rounded up to be held

¹John Henley ‘Chirac refuses Le Pen debate’ theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/24/media.france

in French internment camps before traveling to Auschwitz. The far-right *Ordre Nouveau* movement of the 1960s was also a major component in the Front National's formation, contributing figures like Francois Duprat who served on the party's political bureau until his unsolved assassination in 1978 where he was killed in a car bomb explosion.

Members of the Front National continue to be linked to violent groups. In the 2002 presidential election campaign, it was remarked that Jean-Marie Le Pen's security detail included men dressed all in black with their faces covered in order to protect their identities. There is an overlap in membership between the Front National and violent groups such as *Bloc Identitaire* (BI) and *Groupe Union Défense* (GUD). GUD, whose militia is known as the 'black rats', are known to have kept iron bars or wooden sticks in their premises in order to attack Communists.²

Philippe Vardon is a co-founder of the *Bloc Identitaire* and an elected member of FN who was given a six month prison sentence for assault against non-white people in 2014. Frederic Chatillon is a former leader of the GUD who finances the FN electoral campaigns. Along with Axel Loustau, a former member of GUD, he is currently under investigation for financial improprieties. Other party officials are implicated in several ongoing investigations into illegal financing schemes, which included falsifying job contracts for party officials in the European Parliament.³

Echoing Le Pen Senior's trigger happy history of litigation, Chatillon has taken a journalist to court for accusing him of being a neo-Nazi. The court heard that Chatillon would organise a dinner every year to celebrate Hitler's birthday. Loustau shares Chatillon's admiration of Hitler. He was

photographed giving a Nazi salute at his birthday party in 2011 and shared expressions of sadness with Chatillon on the anniversary of the dictator's death. And yet current party leader Marine Le Pen maintains that she has no Nazis in her party.

What is Fascism?

Even in the 90s, when the openly anti-Semitic Jean-Marie Le Pen was the main voice of the Front National, the press was reluctant to identify the party as fascist. Instead, there has been a tendency to label the party as 'populist'. It is necessary therefore to distinguish between the two concepts of right-wing populism and fascism.

Populism is often used to refer to any political movement which is at variance from the centre of liberal democracy. Implied in this definition is a need to maintain the centre. Anything outside this window is to be regarded as deviant and therefore inherently flawed, or even dangerous. The liberal media therefore sees no issue with identifying the anti-immigrant Nigel Farage as a populist in the same category as the democratic socialist Jeremy Corbyn. Indeed, it claims there are similarities insofar as the rhetoric of both these figures takes aim at the elites and claims to speak up for the 'little people'. Similarly, if the Front National is only a right-wing populist party, then to the liberal centre it is only as much of a threat to bourgeois democracy as the policies of the radical left Jean-Luc Mélenchon. One often sees liberal commentators espouse the 'horseshoe theory' of a safe centre flanked by two extremes which are portrayed as being ideologically similar.

Historically, the term populism is one which evokes the majority of people against the elites. In nineteenth-century Russia, there was a movement known as the Narod-

²Lara Marlowe 'Many Marine Le Pen cohorts linked to neo-Nazi ideas' *Irish Times* [irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/many-marine-le-pen-cohorts-linked-to-neo-nazi-ideas-1.3015127](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/many-marine-le-pen-cohorts-linked-to-neo-nazi-ideas-1.3015127)

³Elaine Ganley 'French radicals winning respect in Le Pen's presidential race' *The Seattle Times* [seattletimes.com/nation-world/french-radicals-get-respect-in-le-pens-presidential-race/](https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/french-radicals-get-respect-in-le-pens-presidential-race/)

niks, or 'Friends of the People', who wanted land for the peasants and mounted terrorist assassination campaigns against the Tsar and his Government. Huey Long, a Louisiana Senator in the 1930s who campaigned against the banks with the slogan, 'Share our Wealth', was also described as a populist.⁴

John Bellamy Foster sees the origins of the modern day definition of populism in Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism wherein 'all forms of opposition to the liberal-democratic management of capitalist society, from whichever direction they come, are to be viewed as illiberal, totalitarian tendencies, and are all the more dangerous if they have mass-based roots'.⁵ The result is a limitation of political discourse, where 'society is thus only democratic to the extent that it is restricted to liberal democracy, which confines the rights and protections of individuals to those limited forms conducive to a structurally inegalitarian capitalist regime rooted in private property'.⁶

When Donald Trump was elected, there were some more alarmist responses who decried him as a fascist. They cited the fact that he employed ultra-nationalist rhetoric, harked back to a mythical past as he claimed he would 'Make America Great Again', pledged to 'drain the swamp' of Washington's corrupt elites, and took an anti-immigration stance to its extreme with his goals of building a wall along the border and banning all Muslims from entering the United States.

Trump posed no threat, however, to bourgeois democracy. Although an 'outsider' as regards the Washington establishment, he adhered to the country's two-party system and therefore was constrained by its limitations. He sought election on the Re-

publican Party ticket and his powers will be constrained by what the Republican Party allows to pass through the House of Representatives and the Senate. His efforts to ban people arriving from Muslim countries have already been struck down by the Supreme Court. While there was a blurring of this distinction when Trump received the backing of the KKK and placed Steve Bannon in his cabinet, there was no concerted effort by Trump to organise his followers in opposition to the institutions of liberal democracy.

Fascism, despite its anti-elitist rhetoric, is not a product of the working class movement. It takes aim not at a system which perpetuates inequality, but at a minority of elites, portrayed as corrupt. Chris Bambery quotes Fromm: 'workers who sympathised with, or belonged to the Nazi party, expressed through their negative attitude towards rationalisation measures [redundancies], a basic hostility towards capitalists. In the political sphere this hatred was deflected and diverted by Nazi propaganda onto specific groups such as rapacious capitalists, owners of department stores, or the Jews.'⁷

The main social base of fascism is in the petty bourgeoisie and its ideology emerges in response to a crisis in capitalism. Bambery quotes Trotsky to identify fascism as the culmination of specific circumstances following a crisis in capitalism. A crisis triggers:

the growth of the radicalisation of the working class; the growth of sympathy towards the working class and a yearning for change on the part of the rural and urban petty bourgeoisie; the extreme confusion of the big bourgeoisie; its cowardly and treacherous manoeuvres aimed

⁴John Molyneux 'Who are the Populists?' *Socialist Worker* socialistworkeronline.net/who-are-the-populists/

⁵John Bellamy Foster 'This Is Not Populism' *Monthly Review* monthlyreview.org/2017/06/01/this-is-not-populism/

⁶*ibid.*

⁷Chris Bambery 'Euro-fascism: The lessons of the past and current tasks' marxists.org/history/etol/writers/bambery/1993/xx/fascism.html

at avoiding the revolutionary climax; the exhaustion of the proletariat; growing confusion and indifference; the aggravation of the social crisis; the despair of the petty bourgeoisie, its yearning for change; the collective neurosis of the petty bourgeoisie; its readiness to believe in miracles; its readiness for violent measures; the growth of hostility towards the proletariat which has deceived its expectations. These are the premises for a swift transformation of a fascist party and its victory.⁸

Trotsky elsewhere puts it more succinctly: ‘When the social crisis takes on an intolerable acuteness, a particular party appears on the scene with the direct aim of agitating the petty bourgeoisie to a white heat and of directing its hatred and its despair against the proletariat.’⁹ Fascism is therefore counter-revolutionary in its character as it sees the proletariat and Marxism as its enemy.

In Italy, Mussolini’s armed gangs of blackshirts sided with employers against the ‘Bolshevik experiment’ of workplace occupations as the capitalist class became panicked by a revolutionary working class. The class composition of the blackshirts is revealing: ‘The *fascio* of the city of Genoa ... was a relatively homogenous organisation; it did not really recruit much from the working class, but had a good base among the white collar workers and the petty bourgeoisie, and the less prosperous professional classes, especially among the newcomers to the city who coveted and resented the superior position held by the respectable ‘na-

tive’ bourgeoisie’.¹⁰ Backed by the Italian military, Mussolini’s blackshirts waged a campaign against the organisation of the left in order to smash it. ‘The winter and spring of 1920–21 was the decisive period of fascist expansion. The fascist *squadristi* conducted a systematic campaign of terror against the socialists and their local institutions (communal councils, party branches, trade unions, co-operatives and even cultural circles).’¹¹ This eradication of the opposition paved the way for Mussolini’s March on Rome and his seizure of power.

The Nazis had a similar base to Mussolini’s fascists in the petty bourgeoisie but also a significant base among the unemployed. Those under 24 years old made up around a quarter of the unemployed. Some on the left, especially those in Stalin’s Communist International, saw fascism as just another form of capitalism. Trotsky, however, warned of its more potent danger:

The coming to power of the National Socialists would mean first of all the extermination of the flower of the German proletariat, the destruction of its organisations, the eradication of its belief in itself and in its future. Considering the far greater maturity and acuteness of the social contradictions in Germany, the hellish work of Italian fascism would probably appear as a pale and almost humane experiment in comparison with the work of the German National Socialists.¹²

When strategising in order to defeat this menace, Chris Bambery emphasises the

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Leon Trotsky ‘The fascist danger looms in Germany’ marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1944/1944-fas.htm#p3

¹⁰ Chris Bambery ‘Euro-fascism: The lessons of the past and current tasks’ marxists.org/history/etol/writers/bambery/1993/xx/fascism.html

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Leon Trotsky ‘Germany, The Key to the International Situation’ marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311126.htm

characteristics we must bear in mind:

i) fascism is the product of capitalism in crisis, ii) it differs from other forms of pro-capitalist government in that it has at its core a petty bourgeoisie mass movement, iii) it aims to destroy working class organisation by dividing it against itself. This is the clear pattern which emerges from the history of the fight against fascism in the 1920s and 1930s in Italy, Germany and France.¹³

It is clear then from previous fascist movements in Europe that fascism is a threat to the working class and its organisations in such a way that distinguishes it from mere ‘populism’. Allowing a fascist movement the cover of populism underestimates the nature of its danger and prevents the working class from rallying in opposition to it. In France the Front National continues to distance its image from that of fascism in order to broaden its appeal and the media is complicit in this transformation. This ‘dédiabolisation’, translated variously as ‘de-demonisation’ and the neater ‘detoxification’, is essentially a cosmetic change but one which has received a lot of attention.

From Jen-Marie to Marine

Since 2011, Jean-Marie Le Pen has ceased to be the party leader of the Front National. His daughter Marine Le Pen has since been in charge and the party’s supposed detoxification has been synonymous with her leadership. Her successes have been numerous. In the 2012 Presidential elections, she did not reach the second round like her father, coming third in the race, but she received a slightly higher percentage of the

vote, at 17.9% compared to Jean-Marie Le Pen’s 16.9% in the first round of the 2002 election. In actual votes, this translates into 6.4 million, meaning she received more even compared to her father’s peak at 5.5 million in the second round against Chirac in 2002.

In the 2014 European elections, Le Pen’s party won more seats than any other party, 24 of France’s 74 seats, taking 4.7 million votes and 24.85% of the vote share. This was reported as a political ‘earthquake’ by the global media as the Eurosceptic party won a nationwide election for the first time in its history.¹⁴

The 2015 regional elections were also a watershed moment for the party. In the first round, they came in first place with over six million votes and a vote share of 27.7%. The second round of the elections saw the other parties withdrawing candidates in a tactical voting strategy in recognition of the Front National’s threat. Whilst the Front National won additional votes in the second round, they came in third place and won no regions.

The 2017 Presidential elections marked another step forward for the ascendant Front National. Marine Le Pen received 21.3% of the vote in the first round, over 7.6 million votes, coming second to En Marche’s Emmanuel Macron, the neoliberal centrist and investment banker who was proclaimed as being ‘neither left nor right’. This meant that a Front National candidate was through to the second round for the first time since 2002. In the second round, Marine Le Pen increased her vote share to 33.9%, securing 10.6 million votes, proving herself to be far more electorally popular than her father. Her rival, Macron, however, received approximately double the amount of Front National ballots with over 66% of the vote. Notably, the second round saw over 4 million people cast a blank ballot or spoil their vote, and turnout decreased by around one and a

¹³Chris Bambery ‘Euro-fascism: The lessons of the past and current tasks’ marxists.org/history/eto1/writers/bambery/1993/xx/fascism.html

¹⁴Mark John and Leila Abboud ‘Far-right National Front stuns French elite with EU ‘earthquake’ *Reuters* reuters.com/article/us-eu-election-france-idUSBREA400CP20140525

half million compared to the first round as the electorate rejected both the fascist option and the extreme centre.

There are various reasons to be considered for these successes of the Front National. The aforementioned ‘detoxification’ should be examined in more detail. On the surface, Marine Le Pen sought to break from the legacy of her father. The family drama between Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter Marine has played out in the media. In 2015, Jean-Marie Le Pen was suspended and subsequently expelled from the party he founded after he once again stated his infamous view that gas chambers were merely ‘a detail’ of history. Controversially, he also gave an interview to *Rivarol*, a publication which hosts anti-Semitic and far-right commentators. Flying in the face of Marine Le Pen’s dediabolisation strategy, he expressed that all kinds of patriots were welcome in the Front National, from Gaullists to Pétainists (supporters of the Nazi collaboration in Vichy France).¹⁵ Due to a series of ongoing legal challenges, Jean-Marie Le Pen continues to hold the title of honorary president of the party. Although much has been made of this public spat, the media has neglected to mention that Marine Le Pen’s presidential campaign was funded by a €6 million loan from her father.¹⁶

Inevitably, tensions in the party arose as Marine Le Pen pursued her detoxification strategy. Expulsions from the party began as she sought to enhance the party’s image. Yvan Benedetti was expelled after proclaiming himself to be ‘anti-Zionist, anti-Semite, and anti-Jew’ while Alexandre Gabriac was forced out after he was photographed per-

forming a Nazi salute.¹⁷ One of the party’s Vice Presidents, Florian Phillipot, who is seen to be one of Marine Le Pen’s key advisors, has received criticism from within party ranks. He is an admirer of De Gaulle, a bone of contention for the imperialists of the party who identify with French Algeria, and he has been identified as responsible for the party’s leftward drift on economic issues. He has received the ire of Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose policies he openly opposes, who denounced him as ‘a socialist, a Chevenementist, a Gaullist, a provocateur’ and he has been the target of many homophobic insults from Jean-Marie and other senior, more traditional figures in the party.¹⁸ There are those in the party who would prefer a low tax and small state model who would disagree with Marine Le Pen’s opposition to neoliberalism. These leftist economic stances do not contradict fascism. Indeed, the welfare state in Nazi Germany increased its provision for those who were not members of the many oppressed groups yet the state also pursued privatisation.¹⁹ Previously, the strategies of Jean-Marie Le Pen faced opposition from Bruno Mégret in 1999 as he sought to appeal to the mainstream right. The party divided into two factions. Many of those ‘Mégretistes’ hold senior positions within the party and Marine Le Pen must take care to ensure she is not seen to be identifying with this faction while she criticises her father.²⁰

The message of the Front National is now couched in terms more acceptable to the French electorate. The party has experienced a ‘republican turn’ where it has ‘increasingly coopted republican discourse and

¹⁵ Jim Wolfreys ‘The Dangers of Detoxification’ *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/04/national-front-detoxification-marine-le-pen-fascism-france-elections/

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Hugh McDonnell ‘How the National Front Changed France’ *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2015/11/marine-jean-marie-le-pen-national-front-immigration-elections/

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ John Bellamy Foster ‘This Is Not Populism’ *Monthly Review* monthlyreview.org/2017/06/01/this-is-not-populism/

²⁰ Hugh McDonnell ‘How the National Front Changed France’ *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2015/11/marine-jean-marie-le-pen-national-front-immigration-elections/

has presented itself as the defender of republican values'.²¹ This cosmetic change has led to Marine Le Pen condemning the actions of the Vichy regime in a way which would have been anathema to her father and, indeed, the founding members of the party who were collaborationists. Although it is to be noted that Marine Le Pen's comments that France was not responsible for the French police's 1942 roundup of thirteen thousand Jews is an act of dog whistle anti-Semitism.²² It harks back to an attitude which predates Chirac's 1995 apology for the French nation's complicity in this crime. Figures such as Charles de Gaulle and Francois Mitterand denied France's involvement in the Holocaust as they saw France as being the republic and not the Vichy regime.

In December 2013, Louis Aliot, a Vice President of the Front National and partner of Marine Le Pen, said that the 'glass ceiling was neither immigration nor Islam' but 'antisemitism that prevents people from voting for [the Front National]'.²³ This observation is one with which Marine Le Pen is in full agreement. Rather than a rift in the party on 'hard and moderate lines', it is more accurate to see the party's transformation as one which recognises the limits of the 'political functionality of antisemitism in contemporary capitalist democracies'.²⁴ The existence of continuing anti-Semitism in the party was laid bare as Marine Le Pen stepped aside as party president during the second round of the French elections in order to appear more representative of France. Her replacement in the interim period was Jean-François Jalkh who has a reputation of Holocaust denial, commenting that Zyklon B (the gas used in Nazi death camps) could not have killed on

such a mass scale. Despite being a member of the party since 1974 and ascending to the ranks of Vice President, he quit the role of interim president after these comments were made public following his appointment into the spotlight.²⁵

A scapegoat whose difference is based on race or religion has not been abandoned. It is not Jews who are present in the daily Front National discourse but Muslims. Secularism in France is used by all the mainstream parties as a tool to conceal Islamophobia and pursue anti-immigrant policies. It also takes the form of colonial racism as hatred is directed at those of North African descent, including people originating from Algeria. Islamophobia has become so widespread and normalised that it has legitimised the racist hatred of the Front National.

President Sarkozy adopted the rhetoric of the Front National in order to displace them but in doing so only allowed their ideas to gain new ground. Terror attacks on French soil served to increase Islamophobia and the events following the Charlie Hedbo killings saw Le Pen welcomed by the mainstream parties as she was invited to the élysée Palace in an act of national unity. Even Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the republican nationalist backed by many on the left, saw fit to emphasise that he agreed with the ban on religious attire in schools. We also saw the debate surrounding the burkini ban in an atmosphere of hatred which included attacks on refugees in the so-called Calais jungle. In this context, Le Pen's comments on Muslims praying being akin to the Nazi occupation (for which she was fined) were reaching a public more receptive to reactionary, racist

²¹Mathieu Desan 'Between Vichy and the Republic' *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/04/national-front-marine-le-pen-holocaust-vichy-republic-secularism/

²²*ibid.*

²³Ugo Pallheta 'Fascism by Another Name' *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/02/france-national-front-marine-le-pen-fascism-antisemitism-xenophobia/

²⁴*ibid.*

²⁵Chloe Farand 'Front National leader replacing Marine Le Pen quits days after nomination over Nazi gas chamber row' *Independent* independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/front-national-leader-jean-francois-jalkh-marine-le-pen-louis-aliot-quits-nazi-gas-chamber-deny-a7706971.html

ideas.

It is perhaps unsurprising that police were forcing women at the beach to disrobe at gunpoint upon learning that over half of France's police force support the Front National. Police brutality is widespread in France and one particular case saw a man being raped by a police truncheon. The police, investigating themselves, found the incident to be entirely accidental with no one held responsible. France has also been in a state of emergency since 2015, the longest uninterrupted period since the Algerian War of Independence in the 1960s.²⁶ This act has seen the deployment of up to 7,000 soldiers on the streets. It gives the police and security services the 'ability to place anyone deemed to be a security risk under house arrest, dissolve groups thought to be a threat to public order, carry out searches without judicial warrants and block any websites that 'encourage' terrorism'. Amnesty International has warned of a worrying erosion of human rights which sees house raids conducted against one religion in particular.²⁷

The French president is not a figurehead but has substantive powers. A Front National president has the potential to implement a qualitative change in French society and democracy. The Fifth Republic's Article 16 allows the president to take 'exceptional measures' when they deem France to be under threat.²⁸ Support for Front National from the electorate, links to violent militias, a sympathetic police force and authoritarian emergency measures paint quite a frightening picture as we see a threatening

road map towards possible fascism.

Fascism will continue to fester under the system which creates the conditions for its growth. The material roots for this ideology are perpetuated by the dominance of the extreme centre. The Socialist Party's embrace of neoliberalism has seen its rejection by the French electorate. Benoit Hamon, from the left of the Socialist Party, received only around 6% of the vote in the 2017 presidential elections. Macron's En Marche was a relatively new party and he was seen as a fresh outsider (although he previously held a post in the Socialist Party's government). Particularly notable is Marine Le Pen's popularity among young voters who have less experience of the Front National's controversial past. Indeed, 'the largest demographic for National Front support comes from voters aged between 18 and 24, where Le Pen polls at 40 percent'. Youth unemployment in France is at almost a quarter, compared to seven percent in Germany and twelve percent in the UK.²⁹

Despite his claim of being 'neither left nor right', the policies of Macron would find a friend in any Tory government. He aims to 'cut 120,000 public jobs, reduce spending by 60 billion Euros, jettison the 35-hour workweek, raise the retirement age, weaken unions' negotiating strength and cut corporate taxes'.³⁰ This will do nothing to stave off the advance of fascism as the neoliberal consensus will continue to abandon the discontented. Some on the French left have pessimistically adopted the slogan 'Macron

²⁶'French parliament votes to extend state of emergency until after 2017 elections' *The Guardian* theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/14/french-parliament-votes-to-extend-state-of-emergency-until-after-2017-elections

²⁷Lizzie Dearden 'French human rights 'at tipping point' as state of emergency continues, says Amnesty International' *Independent* independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-state-of-emergency-extended-latest-human-rights-law-isis-amnesty-international-report-a7595251.html

²⁸Jim Wolfreys 'The Dangers of Detoxification' *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/04/national-front-detoxification-marine-le-pen-fascism-france-elections/

²⁹Shafik Mandhai and Ahmed El Amraoui 'Why does Le Pen get so much support from young voters?' *Aljazeera* aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/le-pen-support-young-voters-170415161404170.html

³⁰Conn Hallinan 'Europe: the Danger of the Center' *Counterpunch* counterpunch.org/2017/06/15/europe-the-danger-of-the-center/

2017 = Le Pen 2022'.³¹ Whilst this is a useful diagnosis of fascism's economic roots in a memorable and accessible slogan, it should not be an acceptance of defeat but rather a call to resistance.

While the story of the election for many was the rise of Le Pen, the gains made were not solely the preserve of the right. Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his movement La France Insoumise soared in popularity as his pledges included 'reducing France's working week from 35 to 32 hours, lowering the retirement age to 60, raising the minimum wage and social security benefits, and taxing earnings of more than €33,000 a month at 100%'.³²

While as socialists we can identify prob-

lems with Mélenchon whose republican nationalism appealed to patriotism, betrayed an inability to address colonial racism and police brutality, and was soft on the issue of widespread and institutionalised Islamophobia, he demonstrated that a radical left alternative to the main parties can inspire hope and action. Taking an impressive 19.5% in the first round, Mélenchon showed that we need not consign ourselves to lesser evilism in a choice between the centre and the far-right. While calling for not a single vote to go to Le Pen, he reserved the right to criticise Macron's policies which his movement must resist at every stage.

³¹Mathieu Bonzom 'Macron 2017 = Le Pen 2022' *Jacobin* jacobinmag.com/2017/04/france-elections-macron-le-pen-extreme-center-neoliberalism-fascism

³²Jon Henley 'French election shaken by surge in support for far-left candidate' *The Guardian* theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/12/french-presidential-election-surge-far-left-candidate-melenchon