

Divisions erupt in neo-fascist National Front during French legislative election

By Francis Dubois
16 June 2017

After the first round of the French legislative elections Sunday, where the National Front (FN) had less than 14 percent of the vote, the internal tensions that emerged after FN candidate Marine Le Pen's defeat, in the second round of the presidential elections on May 7, have exploded. This week in particular, there were bitter exchanges between FN General Secretary Nicolas Bay and the party's vice president, Florian Philippot.

Philippot, who came from the nationalist movement of ex-Socialist Party (PS) leader Jean-Pierre Chevènement, is the architect of the "de-demonization" strategy of the FN, which aims to convince the electorate that the FN has broken with its fascist origins. Bay was responsible of the FN's campaign in the legislative elections, while Philippot led the presidential campaign.

Speaking to *Le Parisien*, Bay attacked Philippot on Monday, saying he "regrets that some in the party have made contradictory noises instead of concentrating on the legislative campaign." Philippot replied with a reply aimed at Bay, who was eliminated in the first round of the legislative elections in his district: "I arrived in first place in my electoral district, I do not feel targeted by this at all. But everyone has an element of responsibility in this, including those who organized the legislative campaign."

Public disputes among the FN leaders since the elections have erupted on various grounds, like the presidential election alliance the FN made with right-wing nationalist Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, or Marine Le Pen's performance in TV debates. But it is the FN's position on the European Union (EU) and the euro that has emerged as the main point of conflict.

Under pressure from the banks, the FN shifted its position on these critical issues in the middle of the

presidential election campaign, going from a French exit from the euro and the EU to a pro-EU and pro-euro position. This triggered bitter battles inside the FN leadership. In mid-May, the FN's principal economist, Bernard Monot, finally declared in an interview with the British *Telegraph* newspaper that "there will be no Frexit" with the FN.

Just after the presidential run-off on May 7, Philippot threatened to leave the FN if it abandoned its policy of leaving the EU and the euro. A week later, he decided to create his own movement inside the FN, "The Patriots."

Robert Ménard, the mayor of Béziers who has substantial influence in the FN, criticized Philippot on Tuesday, saying his support for an exit from the euro was "responsible for the defeat in the presidential elections and the results," in the first round of the legislative elections. He called for "definitively deciding the debate on an exit from the euro and on economic policy."

If a majority of the FN has decided to adopt a more pro-EU policy after the banks intervened to indicate to them their opposition to a Frexit, this policy shift is also due to the pro-German turn in the orientation of French imperialism promoted, above all, by Macron. The loudest criticisms of Philippot in recent days came from defenders of this line. They are seeking to integrate French neo-fascism into the drive to promote European militarism, above all the rearmament of Germany, aspiring to dominate Europe and entering ever more openly into conflict with the United States.

Philippot's policy speaks for a section of the FN that believes that returning to the French franc currency would better re-establish the competitiveness of French industry by "doping" its exports, principally against Germany, thanks to a weak currency. This also means

slashing the real value of workers' wages in France. In November 2016, Marine Le Pen had still defended this policy, as she hailed Trump immediately after his election, applauding "intelligent protectionism" and "economic patriotism."

One of Philippot's most prominent critics during the presidential election campaign was Marion Maréchal Le Pen, the FN legislator and granddaughter of FN founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. She declared after the presidential election that she would temporarily retire from politics, give up her elected position, and abandon the legislative election. Press reports suggested at the time that behind the official reasons was a desire not to appear to enter into conflict with her aunt, Marine Le Pen.

Despite its electoral setbacks and the crisis that it is passing, the FN has not ceased to pose an enormous danger to the working class. This party has gone through various phases, according to whether the ruling class needs its services or not. It is ever more deeply integrated into the political system and the state. It has constantly developed its influence over the last 25 years, above all by exploiting anger at the reactionary policies of the Socialist Party (PS) and its pseudo-left allies.

Its leaders know that the imperialist bourgeoisie will turn to it, for one or another reason, once the situation changes. The political bubble represented by Macron and his The Republic On the March, which the media and the ruling elite are inflating to hide the collapse of the entire political system, threatens to burst at the first serious political conflict with the working class.

As long as figures like Mélenchon continue to block a politically independent struggle of the workers against the bourgeoisie through the promotion of populism and nationalism, parties like the FN will be able to pose as nationalist defenders of "the little man" and develop their influence.

The internal conflicts inside the Le Pen family reported by the media are largely exaggerated. Marine Le Pen has never formally rejected her father's statements denying or trivializing the Holocaust, but only observed that it was not politically opportune to make them. The FN leadership did not attack Marion Maréchal Le Pen over her visit to the royalist *Action française* that "The FN is the most monarchist of France's political parties," or over her cultivation of

the Catholic anti-abortion movement.

The FN remains a far-right, anti-parliamentary party that descends from the collaboration with the Nazi Occupation of France and is violently hostile to the working class. Its "Republican" declarations of faith were all the easier to make as the PS government was at the time imposing a state of emergency, abolishing basic democratic rights and integrating the FN into official politics by inviting Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace.

If the FN currently is having some difficulty devising a strategy amid the rapid political shifts taking place in France and internationally, its priority remains an ultra-reactionary agenda whose two pillars are the defense of French imperialism abroad and repression at home. These basic policies are absolutely compatible with remaining within the EU and the euro currency.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>