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French neo-fascist Marine Le Pen indicted for tweeting pictures of IS killings

Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), was indicted on Thursday for having posted three images of executions by the Islamic State (IS) group on her Twitter account in December 2015. Another FN deputy, Gilbert Collard, had been indicted on similar charges in January. His parliamentary immunity was lifted by the National Assembly in September, and that of Marine Le Pen two months later.

The two far-right legislators face significant prison sentences based on a draconian interpretation of a reactionary article of the Penal Code. The article specifies three years in prison and a €75,000 fine as punishment for “spreading messages of a violent character, that incite terrorism, that are pornographic or tend to gravely harm human dignity ... when this message is likely to be seen ... by a minor.”

The FN is the descendant of the French Nazi-collaborationist regime in Vichy. The WSWS systematically warns of the mortal threat it poses to the working class. However, the WSWS is clearly opposed to any suppression of freedom of expression by the state, including when it targets the far-right.

The indictment of two FN deputies is a dangerous attack on democratic rights. It is part of a vast operation to censor the Internet and undermine political liberties that threatens, above all, the working class and opposition to imperialist war. Just as the French state of emergency imposed after the 2015 Islamist terror attacks in Paris was used to repress protests against the Socialist Party’s (PS) unpopular labor law, the state doubtless plans to use such measures against the working class and the danger on its left.

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The complaint against Le Pen and Collard was launched by former PS Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve. Le Pen said she had posted the pictures on her Twitter account out of disgust at the “parallel” established between IS and the FN by BFM-TV journalist Jean-Jacques Bourdin during an interview with the commentator on Islamic affairs, Gilles Kepel. Le Pen said she wanted to stress the contrast between the violent Islamism of IS and the supposedly parliamentary and more pacific neo-fascism of the FN under her leadership.

Cazeneuve called the pictures “IS propaganda and ... therefore an abject act, an abomination and a real insult to all victims of terrorism.” Manuel Valls, the prime minister at the time, accused Marine Le Pen of “playing with fire.”

This attack on Le Pen was a cynical maneuver, through which the PS tried to maintain the hostility of official public opinion to the FN, while adopting much of the FN’s agenda. The PS was hiding the fact that the 2015 terror attackers were in fact members of Islamist networks fighting NATO’s proxy war in Syria, thus encouraging the population to adopt the simple equation between Muslims and terrorists promoted by FN officials. At the same time, the PS was imposing FN policies like the state of emergency, deprivation of nationality and calls for a military national guard.

As polls showed the FN profiting from the far-right turn of the PS, various pundits launched the claim that IS was trying to build up the FN, and vice versa. Bourdin took up this line during the interview with Kepel, declaring: “Let’s get back to IS. I would like to discuss the links, uh, between IS and the FN, well, the links, not the direct links between IS and the National Front, but this type of concentration on one identity, which finally is a community ... of mind, because the idea of IS is to push French society to close in on its own identity.”

This argument is fundamentally false. Islamist militias in Syria are linked to the state in France, as well as in other NATO countries. The FN maintained a complicit silence on this state of affairs, but responsibility for it lay above all with the ruling party, the PS. The rise of IS and other Islamist militias in Syria, like the Al Qaeda-linked Al Nusra Front, flows from the decades-long intervention of the United States and the European imperialist powers in the Middle East, their occupation of Iraq, and their use of terrorist militias in a war for regime change in Syria.

For now, censorship is being aimed at a far-right party. But the charge against Le Pen, of having drawn attention on Twitter to crimes of anti-governmental militias in Syria, has many other targets. It can also be aimed at any left-wing, anti-war organization who would

post images or videos showing the Syrian “rebel” groups’ operations to unmask the criminal character of the Islamist militias supported by NATO and France’s PS government against Damascus. In the final analysis, this threatens the rights of the entire working class.

Plans for the implementation of political censorship on the Internet are very advanced. Social media like Facebook and Twitter and search engines like Google already systematically censor the political contents of their sites or searches, working closely with Washington and the European imperialist powers.

Workers cannot in any way struggle against the rise of neo-fascism by supporting censorship organized by the capitalist state, as socialist organizations will be the main targets. During the 20th century, and particularly in the 1930s and during the rise of fascism, it was through attacking far-right organizations that the state machine forged the political instruments that were then used to persecute and suppress the organizations of the working class.

The charges against Le Pen and Collard will also allow the FN, a party whose tradition is the violent suppression of the organized working class and of socialism, to present itself yet again as a victim of the oligarchy and an “anti-system” party. This is its favorite tactic to win a hearing among broad sections of the population disgusted with the reactionary policies of the PS.

Le Pen has wasted no time in proceeding with this strategy. “From the beginning of this story, I knew this was a case of political persecution,” she said on Thursday. She added, “this is an operation to kill freedom of expression. ... If they find me guilty of this, it will be a medal that I will wear on my jacket.”

Internet censorship is reactionary, and anyone claiming to struggle against neo-fascism by allowing it to be used against the FN is only spreading dangerous illusions. The struggle against neo-fascism will proceed through the mobilization of the working class in France and across Europe against war and neo-colonialism, for the defense of democratic rights, and against the social-democratic parties and their political satellites whose right-wing policies open a path for the far right.