

warning, issued by the orator at Mzwandile Miggels's funeral, that, no, Steytlerville will never be the same. □

■ LETTER FROM EUROPE

The Resistible Rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen

DANIEL SINGER

Paris
History, *pace* Hegel and Marx, need not repeat itself as farce. When the French right blames bloody immigrants and the Reds in the Mitterrand government for growing unemployment, memories of the 1930s send shivers down the spine. Admittedly, the jobless are not as numerous today as they were then and their fate is not quite the same. There are also some encouraging signs of reaction on the left—for example, the Woodstock-like rally in the heart of Paris on June 15 which drew some 300,000 youngsters to the Place de la Concorde to listen to rock groups and comedians under the antiracist banner of the “Hands off my pal” campaign. But before assessing the possibilities of a reversal, one must look at the grim tide itself, and especially at Jean-Marie Le Pen, the man whose name is synonymous with the recent revival of overt racism in French politics and society.

He no longer wears a black patch over his left eye, which he lost in a political brawl. It made him look less like a pirate than like the thug he has been throughout his adult life. Smiling, smartly dressed, he now seems—particularly on television, where he is on his best behavior—a frank and reasonable fellow saying aloud “what everybody really believes,” telling people “what they already know,” a man who merely echoes the basic precept of that great American Ronald Reagan: namely, that communism is the root of all evil. A red-faced, rather fat man who warns the “silent majority” against muggers, drug addicts, gays and crypto-pinkos, Le Pen might be described as a sort of French Spiro Agnew preaching law and order, except that he is not of Greek or any other foreign extraction. That is an important difference, because the man and the movement he leads, the National Front, trumpet the slogan “Frenchmen First” and spread the fairy tale that everything would be fine in the streets and hospitals, in the schools and even the factories were it not for the foreign hordes invading France, particularly those crossing the Mediterranean. France would be just marvelous without Marxists, Arabs and other aliens.

Jean-Marie Le Pen was born fifty-seven years ago in Brittany. The orphaned son of a fisherman, he came to Paris to study law and rapidly became notorious in the Latin Quarter as a Red-baiter and an active participant in

drunken or political brawls. He completed his education as a soldier, going to Indochina with the paratroopers of the Foreign Legion after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. At the age of 26 and back in Paris, he was elected to Parliament as a member of a political movement whose rise helps us understand the current success of the National Front.

The 1950s in France saw the beginning of mass migration from the countryside and of industrial as well as commercial concentration in the cities. Since nobody likes to be eliminated, even in the name of economic progress, the traders, craftsmen and other victims of the squeeze rebelled. Their discontent was exploited by a shopkeeper from southern France who cleverly put the blame for their misfortunes on eggheads, tax collectors and Jewish-owned big business. His name was Pierre Poujade. To everybody's surprise, his movement, a seven-day wonder, gained nearly 11 percent of the vote in the 1956 elections and more than two score deputies. Le Pen, an unscrupulous but efficient demagogue, was for a while Poujade's lieutenant, and in the Parliament he expressed his distaste for racial impurity with this oft-quoted apostrophe to Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France, a Jew: “You crystallize in your person a certain number of patriotic and almost physical repulsions.”

In 1957, a year after the elections, Le Pen split with Poujade and turned his attention to the colonial war in Algeria, volunteering for service as a paratrooper. Herein lies another clue to his present support: he has the backing of European settlers who fled to France when Algeria won its independence. Recently a skeleton was taken out of his closet: *Le Canard Enchaîné* provided chapter and verse showing that, among other exploits, Le Pen had been an active performer in the torture chamber at the notorious Villa Susini, in Algeria, where instruments ranged from old-fashioned whips to modern electrical gadgets. A story in *Liberation*, drawing on Algerian witnesses, accused him of acting as an executioner. Le Pen sued both publications for libel, but they won. The judge reasoned that you couldn't defend the principle of the use of torture in Algeria, as Le Pen had done, and be libeled when accused of putting the principle into practice. Le Pen had argued not that the facts were wrong but that his honor had been impugned.

For the extreme right the war in Algeria was a high-water mark. The chief beneficiary of their struggle, however, was Gen. Charles de Gaulle, who took advantage of the 1958 political crisis to bring down the tottering Fourth Republic. When he sought to extricate himself from the colonial mess, the European settlers in Algeria and the military barons who had made him king felt betrayed. They formed the Secret Army Organization (O.A.S.) and succeeded in spreading terror in Algeria and even in exporting it to France. The tide of popular opinion was flowing against the O.A.S., however, and Le Pen was clever enough not to tie himself too closely to a loser. But there was no doubt about his feelings. In 1965, three years after Algeria won independence, he served as campaign manager for Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignacourt, a presidential candidate who sought to unite the mourners of *Algerie Française* with older fragments of French reaction. Tixier-Vignacourt, who had been the chief

attorney for the O.A.S. leaders and a former junior minister in Marshal Petain's Vichy government during World War II, symbolized the union of colonialism and collaboration. This mixture brought him no more than 5 percent of the votes cast, the high point of the far right's support for several years to come.

For Le Pen those were lean years. Having lost his seat in the National Assembly, he had to earn a living. With some colleagues, he set up a company specializing in historical phonograph records, mainly of military songs. They were sued and fined under France's antiracist laws because the liner notes on an album of Nazi songs described Hitler's movement as "on the whole popular and democratic." Politically, things were hardly better. Fascist thugs were swept out of their favorite Latin Quarter haunts by the mass student movement in 1968. Four years later the various extremist sects of the right merged to form the National Front. Le Pen, the least disreputable of the lot, was chosen to be their leader, but their electoral strength was still measured in fractions of a percentage point.

Then came a stroke of good fortune. A degenerate, or shall we say worthy, heir of an industrial empire (the Lambert cement company) died young, leaving his fortune to the leader of the National Front. Part of the family wanted to fight the will on the ground that its author was of unsound mind, but an out-of-court settlement in 1977 gave Le Pen a mansion on the outskirts of Paris and enough money not to have to worry about financial matters. In fairness, it should be said that prosperity did not weaken his political appetite, though the fat years were still to come. In the 1974 presidential poll, won narrowly by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Le Pen obtained 0.75 percent of the vote. Seven years later, when François Mitterrand triumphed, Le Pen could not even find the number of elected officials required in France to sponsor a presidential candidacy. The economic crisis of the 1970s helped spread xenophobia, preparing the ground for the National Front. But the victory of the left in the 1981 elections and its subsequent failure to cope with the crisis was necessary before Le Pen could take off.

The French right, deprived of the spoils after twenty-three years in office, was desperate to return to power. When the euphoria of the Socialist victory dissipated after a year, the right hit back without scruple, pandering to fears and prejudices. After a quarter-century of heedless urban development, the cities were coming apart at the seams. Growing unemployment had, predictably, fostered petty crime and a general feeling of insecurity. These were attributed to the left and its "lax" Minister of Justice, Robert Badinter, in particular. Although during the previous two decades the right had presided over the mass importation of cheap foreign labor, it placed blame for the immigrants "grabbing your jobs" squarely on the shoulders of France's "Marxist" rulers. It is well known, after all, that the "Reds," like the Labor Party in Britain, liberals in the United States and Socialists in France, are nigger, Jew and Arab lovers.

Orthodox conservatives, however unscrupulous, are not

champions at this game. The National Front always stoops lower than they do. While conservatives criticize the Minister of Justice, the newspaper of the front writes that he is "always for the marginal and against a society that had for a long time rejected the Badinters," and the reader translates: bloody foreign Jews. While the right talks of unemployment, the front invents the absurd but eloquent equation "2 million immigrant workers = 2 million unemployed Frenchmen." And Le Pen speaks of invaders "who want to sleep in my bed, with my wife."

In the local elections of March 1983, the main theme was law and order. The National Front was probably the chief beneficiary of this issue, scoring well for the first time in many urban areas. Le Pen himself was elected to one of the twenty town halls of Paris. The turning point, however, came six months later, in the battle of Dreux, a small town northwest of Paris [see Singer, "The Rise of the Nouveaux Liberals," *The Nation*, November 12, 1983]. The original vote was so close that another poll was ordered, and the National Front, with an openly racist platform, managed to capture 16.7 percent of the first-round vote. That was bad enough, but there was worse to come. As no side had gained an absolute majority, a second round was required, and between ballots the "respectable" right welcomed members of the front on its own list of candidates. It was as if the Republican Party had made a deal to have Ku Klux Klan candidates on its ticket. Racism rewarded.

It must be granted that not all conservative politicians approved of this squalid arrangement. Simone Veil, a former president of the European Parliament and a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, said that had she been a voter in Dreux, she would have abstained. Yet she did not resign from her party or from the right-wing coalition whose main



leaders—the very distinguished Raymond Barre, Jacques Chirac and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing—did not share her distaste. The late Raymond Aron, the famous sociologist who is now being hailed as a paragon of democratic conservatism, sided at the time with those who argued that to have four “quasi-fascist” councilors in Dreux was nothing compared with having four “Red fascists”—read Communist ministers—in the government. As Mark Antony would have put it, these are “honorable men”; indeed, one of them is certain to be the next conservative candidate for the presidency.

The label of respectability bestowed on the front had its obvious consequences. Its rating in opinion polls rose sharply. Le Pen became a popular guest on the talk shows and proved to be a clever performer. He knows how to hold back on television and then let loose at rallies of his own supporters. The reward came in June of last year. In the elections for the European Parliament the front obtained nearly 11 percent of the vote (like Poujade in his time); that is to say, almost as much as the Communist Party. Ten National Front deputies now sit in the European assembly, next to their Italian comrades from Giorgio Almirante's neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement.

Nor was it a flash in the pan, as some had hoped, on the assumption that voters do not much care who sits in the European Parliament. In regional elections held earlier this year the front roughly equaled its June score, considering it did not put up candidates throughout the country. Indeed, it polled 20 to 30 percent of the vote in some towns on the French Riviera, in Marseilles and in Montpellier. It did exceptionally well in regions where most of the French refugees from Algeria have settled. Now that the voting system for parliamentary elections has been switched to proportional representation, Le Pen and his gang are bound to win seats in the National Assembly next March. Indeed, some Socialists are relying on the threat of this to prevent a clear-cut verdict for the “respectable” right.

The entry of avowed racists into the French Parliament is not in itself the worst prospect. As the old saying goes, you don't bring the temperature down by breaking the thermometer. I am not even most shocked that in France today one person out of ten, one out of five in many places, votes for a party whose leader is an open defender of apartheid and an admirer of Gen. Augusto Pinochet. More worrisome is the underlying ideological shift to the right, the radical metamorphosis of the substance and form of political debate, of which this plague is only a symptom.

It will be objected that this is merely a revival, that anti-Semitism in France goes back to the last century, to the Dreyfus case and beyond, that in the 1930s fascism paraded openly and racism was incomparably more virulent. True, but that was before the Holocaust. After that, for some thirty-five years, people didn't dare speak, or even think, in quite the same terms. Now they do again. Yesterday they had to say, I am not a racist but. . . . Today they no longer take the precaution. And apparently decent people echo Le Pen almost unawares. To paraphrase Brecht, the “filthy beast” was not killed off in Nazi Germany. If we don't keep

a watchful eye, it will pounce back on the political stage wherever it gets an opportunity.

In my next letter I will look at the fact and fiction behind the immigration figures, at the cowardly surrender of the left and its real problems and at the hopeful signs of a change of tide. History, after all, need not repeat itself as tragedy either. □

■ REVIVING THE MON VALLEY

The Campaign to Save Dorothy Six

DAVID MORSE

To U.S. Steel, Dorothy Six is just another blast furnace that the company cannot operate profitably and plans to dynamite and use for scrap. The company has decided to dismantle the entire “hot end” of its Duquesne, Pennsylvania, works—the big No. 6 blast furnace, the basic oxygen process shop and the primary rolling mill, which is used to roll ingots into steel slabs—to make way for an industrial park.

To a growing coalition of trade unionists and community organizers in the steel valleys surrounding Pittsburgh, Dorothy Six is a symbol of local and regional self-determination. Built in 1966, Dorothy was the biggest and most productive furnace in the valley, turning out 5,000 tons of crude steel a day. It stands more than one hundred feet tall and has a hearth eleven feet in diameter. Only weeks before it was shut down in May 1984, Dorothy was awarded the company's Iron Master Award for breaking production records. In its heyday, 8,000 were employed at the Duquesne Works. Idled, the blast furnace symbolizes the region's wasted resources.

Local activists have devised a plan for worker ownership of Duquesne's hot end, which they say would restore from 500 to 1,000 jobs immediately and help reverse the process of decay that has ravaged the Monongahela Valley. (After the Duquesne Works shut down, employment at Homestead, a downstream mill, dropped from 3,000 to 1,000 in six months. The American Iron and Steel Institute estimates that every job in a steel mill generates three to four jobs upstream and downstream.) Cars in Duquesne display bumper stickers that read “SAVE DOROTHY. SAVE JOBS.”

“We see this as striking a blow against disinvestment and capital flight,” says steelworker Mike Stout, who is head of the grievance committee for Homestead Local 1397 of the United Steelworkers of America. Stout is also active in the Tri-State Conference on Steel, a grass-roots think tank made up mainly of former steelworkers, which has come up

David Morse, who is completing a book on the steel industry, recently returned from a trip to study the industry in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

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