

The Thrashing of France's "Left", The Rise of Le Pen's "Front National"

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Image: Marine Le Pen

Let's hope that the solemn blow taken by the socialists in the French municipal elections erases the vapid smiles from the big faces of Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, until now untouched by doubt that the policies of austerity pursued by the European Commission would benefit right-wing parties. And not the type of Right, to be clear, of Mario Monti, but of the extreme and fascist(-ized) parties. It is pointless to acknowledge that one such figure is, without pretence, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, who held the European presidency for six months. These are also the forces that are everywhere smashing the residual bipolarities between the 'democratic' right and left. The latest sensational case is France where on Sunday, March 23rd, elections took place in 36,000 municipalities, and where the Front National of Le Pen, anti-Semitic, xenophobic and anti-European, not only became – where it was present – the first place party, but drove the Socialist Party, which was in the lead in the presidential election two years ago, not into second but into third place, while the Communist Party and the front of left-wing parties frequently slipped to fourth place.



Marine Le Pen on the campaign trail, with her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of *Front National*, by her side.

This was to be expected when unemployed and precarity affects four million French citizens; not much different than Italy. For a couple of years now, almost daily, a large or medium-sized French firm relocates or closes, and the Holland government, who had won pledging to fight against finance, has not been able to defend employment, neither in general nor when a firm shuts or relocates while announcing lavish profits. The workers emerge from their departments determined to fight; they receive the solidarity of the mayor if, as often, the effected company was also the most important in the surrounding region. The usual result is that at the end of three weeks one has to be content with negotiating a so-called 'social plan,' other and for the most part distant jobs or compensation, and with the condolences of trade union centrals and the ministries concerned. Last week, three days before the municipal elections, the firm La Redoute shutdown. It was the oldest and most famous catalogue mail order company, which alone accounted for a large share of the consumption by the middle classes, but now drags entire industrial cities into ruin, eroding the possibilities for consumption by the mass of workers and the petite bourgeoisie.

Was all this visible and predictable? Yes, except for a socialist government, similar to our PD

(Democratic Party) in Italy, for whom treaties dictate non-interference in order to avoid disturbing free competition; and for a government that hopes to get away with costly and difficult military endeavours in the former French imperial colonies in Mali and in the Central African Republic. This while the president and the foreign minister Laurent Fabius clamour for a heavy hand against Putin in Crimea; as if the well-known nationalism of *l'Hexagone* could make people forget the growing conditions of impoverishment.

Confronted with the results last night the entire staff of the Socialist Party was taken aback, while Marine Le Pen was rolling in the triumph of the blue wave that carried her name. Satisfied with the result is also the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) of Sarkozy, assured that the government will call for national antifascist unity, legitimating the vote for the republican Right, like at the time of the fall of Lionel Jospin in the presidential elections of 2002. Will the European Commission take note? Will the heads of the EU take note of the evidence that the Europe of monetarism and austerity is reviving the extreme Right for the first time since the Second World War? And that the *Front National* is becoming the leading populist party in France? Will the many in Italy take note, who are benevolently observing Matteo Renzi and the game of three-card monte, which consists of (maybe) putting more into the pay checks of low income earners who will then lose out in public services cuts and in local taxes?

The PD is in fact following the same path as Hollande, and its feeble internal Left does not appear capable of getting it to change course. And what of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) of Susanna Camusso, who is in an uproar after recently having approved a labour relations accord with Confindustria (Italian Employers' Federation) considered too extreme even for our battered neighbour? And what of the FIOM (Metal Workers Union) of Maurizio Landini, which, isolated, is also hopeful of Matteo Renzi?

In short, we can only hope that the hard blow in France, difficult to recover from in the second round, will function as a severe lesson against the excesses of folly during the last twenty years in Europe.

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