

Rising Public Support Emboldens Immigration-Control Candidates

By PAUL GOTTFRIED

A certain similarity exists between the French National Front, which garnered slightly over 25 percent in the recent EU elections, and the soaring poll numbers of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate. Both the supporters of Marine Le Pen, who is president of the Front, and the largely working-class fans of billionaire presidential candidate Donald Trump are routinely denounced in the establishment press as the morally indecent “far right.” From all appearances, however, media attacks on these burgeoning movements have had no impact on their continuing growth.

Although the Republican establishment and the Murdoch press came down gangbusters on Trump after the August 6 debate for Republican presidential candidates, Trump’s poll numbers are continuing to rise. Unlike the Murdoch media, however, the *Washington Post* (August 5) has dealt objectively with why Trump enjoys almost three times the poll numbers of his nearest rival, Jeb Bush. His attacks on indiscriminate immigration for hurting American workers, whose wages have been stagnating for decades, resonates well with millions of struggling Americans. The *Post* reporter, Jim Tankersley, quoting former Clinton adviser Mickey Kaus, points out that while Trump “is not the only Republican candidate who’s talking tough on immigration,” “he’s the one framing the argument that ‘we’re being taken advantage of.’ And that appears to be connecting.”

Paul Gottfried is the retired Horace Raffensperger Professor of Humanities at Elizabethtown College and a Guggenheim recipient. He is the author of ten books, including The Conservative Movement, Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory, Conservatism in America: Making Sense of the American Right, Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America: A Critical Appraisal, The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium, After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State, Encounters: My Life with Nixon, Marcuse, and Other Friends and Teachers, and Fascism: The Career of a Concept (November 2015).

Neither the *Post* nor Kaus, who has written about the anemic wages of American workers, has a dog in this fight. As far as I know, neither is being paid by the super-donors of the GOP, like the Koch brothers or Sheldon Adelson. They argue forthrightly that although “immigration may grow GDP,” it is doing nothing to help American workers. Needless to say, this is not a problem most of our Republican presidential candidates would care to engage. When in the debate on August 5 Jeb Bush stressed that amnestying illegals and presumably increasing immigration from Latin America would spur enormous economic growth in the U.S., none of the far from dispassionate question-askers bothered to grill him on his statements. Nor did Mexico-booster Jeb represent the Trump-supporters interviewed by the *Post* in Virginia, who were full of rage about losing their jobs to cheaper Hispanic laborers: “For white workers, these people are taking their jobs. Literally taking their jobs, as I see it. Almost all the white guys are gone. There’s almost no black guys.”

The National Front may be the European model that resembles the Trump movement the most closely in terms of its social appeal; and so it may pay here to note a few facts about a mass party in Europe that has prospered in the face of media loathing. A sympathetic critic Guillaume Faye sums up the reasons that the Front resonates among its core voters:

It “crystalizes the anguish of millions of French natives who have become progressively strangers in their own country, in the land of their fathers, who are insulted and stigmatized incessantly by protected oligarchs, ethno-masochists, and xenophiles. They are the ones who suffer the ravages of mass immigration and mounting Islamicization. They are the ones whose lives are ruined not only by high taxes that weigh on the middle classes and their families but who submit to a state and justice system that acts in breach of their duty and which do not provide for their safety. Indeed this system does more to aid clandestine families than a Frenchman who has roots in the country [un Français de souche], someone who is unemployed or retired but who has paid taxes his entire life in the private sector. Such people feel nostalgic for a

France that is disappearing and where they lived well.”

The National Front stands out among parties in Western Europe because it is the only one that may someday take power in a major European country but which is thundered against in news services as “right-wing extremist.” But progress toward assuming national power will depend on the capacity of Marine Le Pen and her advisers to negotiate alliances with center parties currently allied to the UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire), the biggest and richest party in the media-approved “conservative” coalition, which is in the process of changing its name to Les Républicains.



National Front's Marine Le Pen

In France a single mega-party has long dominated politics at all levels, and it is a fusion of Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP, its changing centrist partners, and the Socialist Party on the official left. Frenchmen refer to this as the “UMPS” the way Americans who are disenchanted with our politics-as-usual refer contemptuously to our “Demreps” or “Repdem.” In runoff electoral races, which take place if no single French party or party bloc can win a majority the first time around, the duopoly will mechanically back someone from their ranks, lest the National Front win an elected office. In Michel Houellebecq's partly satirical novel *Soumission*, the UMP and the Socialists work together to keep a member of the Front from winning the presidency. As an act of desperation, the establishment parties get behind a Muslim fanatic running in the French presidential race, who, once elected, proceeds to Islamicize France. Houellebecq is underlining the frantic way in which the parties in power close ranks against “the extreme Right,” no matter what the cost of this reflex gesture.

The National Front must therefore work hard to expand its electoral base, in order to build an alliance with one or more of the centrist splinter groups. If it can

obtain a majority of the votes for representatives to the National Assembly or in the presidential race, however, it may be able to form its own government despite the intransigent opposition of the “UMPS.” Under Marine Le Pen and the vice president of the Front, Florian Philippot, great efforts have been made to render the party appealing to the indigenous working class and, more recently, to France's huge civil service class. In its latest party program, state employees, particularly teachers, have been assured that the Front will look after them, providing they think of themselves and act as members of the historic French nation.



Republican Presidential Candidate Donald Trump

Marine has struggled hard to dissociate the Front from the battles of her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who has had stormy relations with Jewish organizations. The senior Le Pen has struck back furiously at groups that have tried to implicate the French people in the Holocaust. Although Marine and Philippot are being prudent in trying to distance themselves from the verbal indiscretions of the former head of the Front, one may question the wisdom of the extent of her departure from Jean-Marie's more traditional conservative stands. Unlike Marine, Jean-Marie had called for decentralizing France's public school system, which, like its American counterpart, is occupied mostly by representatives of the Left. Jean-Marie, has also always been wary of France's vast public administration, which employs about a quarter of the national workforce and has advocated reducing the size and influence of the French administrative class. Even more significantly, he goes beyond the modest republican patriotism of his daughter and proclaims France to be a “civilization” reaching back fifteen hundred years. It is the historic nation rather than “republican institutions” that commands his respect. Finally, Jean-Marie has been unflinchingly forthright in speak-

ing about “*le grand remplacement*,” the process by which the native population in France is being replaced by a growing Third World presence.

Most French traditionalists and French critics of a steadily expanding welfare state believe that the National Front may be going too far in shedding its nationalist and fiscally responsible identity. According to many of its non-leftist critics, the National Front is becoming just another welfare-state party, albeit one that is taking a hard stand regarding illegals and sending back “asylum-seekers.” (Even “asylum-seekers” whose rights to stay in France have been denied, have benefited from extended “temporary allocations of aid” and medical assistance.) Guillaume Faye has warned the Front’s leadership against forgetting the major reasons that Frenchmen support it, which are “the problems of immigration, a perceived Islamic threat, physical safety, and ethnic-national identity.” Both Marine and Philippot, who was trained as a French administrator at the prestigious Ecole Nationale d’Administration, may falsely imagine that their voters are demanding new social programs, even at the cost of higher taxes. The Front, according to Faye, has elected to take over the “positions of the old extreme Left,” while trying to fuse them with a tough immigration policy.

To whatever extent this criticism may be true, the same can be said about where Trump has positioned himself. Trump’s recent defense of Planned Parenthood, although not the organization’s abortion activities, his backtracking on sending back illegal Mexican residents, and his defenses of the IRS as a tax-collecting agency are clearly indications of Trump’s efforts to expand his base. But these overtures may not help him, any more than Marine’s championing of French functionaries and public school instructors as “integral parts of the Republic” will provide her party with mainstream respectability. She and Trump have been ridiculed by the establishment media and the political establishment for being opportunistic and inconsistent when they try to mainstream themselves. This is to be expected. Spokespersons for the Demreps, establishment columnists like George Will, Peggy Noonan, and Clarence Page, and the

usual editorialists in *Le Monde* and *Figaro* are always on the prowl for right-wingers who are seen as stepping out of line. And once the establishment finds its targets, it’s not going to let up, not even if its preferred targets offer spanking-new social programs. It is also foolish to think that the desperate flock to critics of immigration who are being spat on by the media because these critics are eager to pay civil servants larger pensions or are trying to save government subsidies for Planned Parenthood. Support for the credible Right comes from the angry and alienated, not from Jeb Bush’s ten or twelve corporate backers and least of all from the editorial boards of the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*.

It is one thing to assure the forty or fifty percent of the population that (unfortunately) is dependent on government salaries or pensions that they won’t be abandoned if the National Front or the Trumpites come to power. It’s another thing to try to outdo the socialist or Cultural Marxist Left in promising goodies that leftist constituents expect the Left to deliver. There is no way the Right can hope to beat the Left by expanding leftist social programs.

In one critical respect, however, the National Front is in a much stronger position than the Trumpites. They have an organized party with a program, the most recent of which was issued in January 2012, and this widely distributed program limits as well as underlines what the party is committed to doing. By contrast, what Trump stands for depends on what he chooses to say. This is not entirely the Donald’s fault. He is operating in a country in which the duopoly and its protectors have prevented a third (really a second) party from evolving on the non-prescribed right. Our system is even more locked in place than the French one. We are therefore dependent on charismatic figures in order to galvanize the Right; and these figures, like Buchanan and Trump, have to operate within the Republican Party, an organizational tent whose gate-keepers want nothing to do with them. Given these operational difficulties, Trump may be the best presidential candidate that the American populist Right can find at the present time. ■