

The Party of the Indigenous of the Republic Threatened in France by the extreme-Right

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The spokesperson of the Indigenous of the Republic in France, an anti-racist and anti-imperialist decolonial militant, Houria Bouteldja,¹ has been falsely accused before the courts of racism against whites.

<http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2010/05/733514.php>

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The founder and spokesperson of the Party of the Indigenous of the Republic (Parti des indigènes de la république), Houria Bouteldja, was summoned before a prosecutor this past May 6, 2010 and must appear in court—the date of which has yet to be determined—following a complaint filed by an association of the extreme-right that accuses her of professing racism against whites.

The acts for which she is being charged date back to June 2007. Three years ago, on a television program² Houria Bouteldja coined a neologism that would give much to talk about: “souchien”.³ The expression emerged from a collation of those French who boast of being “de souche” (or who, in English, would be “full-blooded,” “of [pure] race”) in accordance to the habitual French expression, and to which Houria Bouteldja added: “We call them “souchiens” (“lineaged” or “highborn”).⁴ On the set, none of the invited guests—not even her opponents—made any comment. In the eyes of everyone, it was a matter, without doubt, of an innocent neologism.

But we did not count on the always-polemical ability of the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, who stands out as especially reactionary despite enjoying a reputation for being a man of the Left... In effect, several weeks later, once the word had been forgotten, Alain Finkielkraut decided to lash out against Houria Bouteldja in a radio show⁵ accusing her of having treated whites as “sous-chiens” (sub-dogs).⁶ Moreover, the tendency of unscrupulous police to invent evidence of crimes is well known; sometimes even sliding a costly stone in the pocket of a poor devil they want to accuse. Well, that is what, roughly, was done by the French intellectual: he dropped, as if it was nothing, a tiny dash between two syllables, in a way that the word “souchiens” (lineaged, “purebred”, or purebloods) was transformed into “sous-chiens” (sub-dogs, “mongrels” or “hack”) and what was initially an innocent attempt at linguistic creativity, became an insult with racist overtones. Other intellectuals, journalists and political personalities were quick to pounce on the Indigenous of the Republic, and in particular, on its spokesperson.

A year after these events and following strong protests from the extreme right in the face of the organized demonstrations by this political formation (PIR/MIR) with respect to commemoration of the colonial massacres of Setif and Guelma (Algeria),⁷ Mr. Brice Hortefeux, the current Minister of the Interior of France, who at that time held an Immigration and National Identity card, retook to the accusations. With the backing of the upper ranks of his party—the UMP—, the Minister announced criminal proceedings against Houria Bouteldja, but gave no continuity, since, it was evident, he knew perfectly well that it was a matter of a difficult accusation to defend before the courts.

When the issue appeared to have lost strength, the “Alliance Générale contre le Racisme et pour le respect de l’Identité Française et chrétienne” (General Alliance Against Racism and for the Respect of the French and Christian Identity—AGRIF in its French acronym) expressed its intention of pressing the incident before the court. This association, which fights against racism and for respect of French and Christian identity, constitutes one of the satellites in the constellation of the catholic and traditionalist, ultranationalist and racist Right; an influential widespread current which converges with notorious anti-Semitic former collaborators of the Vichy regime, fervent supporters of colonization, former members and sympathizers of the terrorist group of ultraright bent OAS (from the French, Organisation de l’Armée Secrète), Christian fundamentalists, and others nostalgic for the Crusades. And all of them, of course, are equally committed in the campaigns against immigration and populations from the former colonies; all of them equally organized against the “Muslim invasion” of France and uncompromising supporters of the “clash of civilizations” to “save” white, Christian and western civilization. This [political] current, we must not forget, has numerous connections with the National Front, party of the extreme right and especially powerful: its leader, Jean Marie Le Pen, reached the second round of presidential elections in 2002 and, despite suffering an electoral beating in 2007, his party experience a resurgence in recent regional elections, where it obtained more than 11% of the votes in the first round.

The judicial proceedings to which an attempt has been made to submit the PIR can be seen as anecdotal, taking into account the futility of the accusations proffered against its spokesperson. However, it would be dangerous to underestimate its significance in a political context marked by the exacerbation of conflicts. While racism manifests itself each time in increasingly brazen ways, above all in its Islamophobic version—and in this assessment we include parties on the Left—at the same time that the team of President Sarkozy, confronted by a grave socioeconomic crisis, does not seize in their efforts to give concessions to the extreme-right electorate in view of the 2012 presidential elections, the resistance movements among the populations of colonial migrations, and in particular Black and Arab youth of the suburbs,⁸ grow in equal proportion.

The PIR constitutes one of its most promising expressions. This formation founded just a few weeks ago, in late February 2010, is the daughter of the Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic (MIR), which was configured as an association in 2005 to denounce racist hierarchies and power relations inherited from colonialism and from the imperialist policies of the great powers.⁹ The PIR, which calls itself a “decolonial party,” stands as the framework that would allow the resistance movements of the suburbs to organize and gain strength and breadth, directly invading the political field. In fact, the PIR does not hide its desire to participate in the next round of voting to give voice to the residents of the suburbs and “indigenized” populations. The appearance of the MIR five years ago had already greatly inconvenienced the French political class (in all its tendencies). Its current transformation into a political party, boasting a significant mobilization capacity, does not stop unsettling or inciting to its rupture not only the extreme right, but also the official political authorities. This judicial proceeding initiated against Houria Bouteldja might signify, from this point of view, a first step toward the adoption of tougher measures against the PIR.

NOTES

¹ An English translation of an Interview with Houria Bouteldja can be found at:
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/bouteldja281009.html>

² The program “Ce soir ou jamais” (Tonight or Never) is a space convened by the journalist Frédéric Taddeï, broadcast on the French television chain FR3.

³ In French, “souchien” constitutes a neologism, which results from applying to the noun “souche” (lineage, caste, ancestry or “stock”) the corresponding French suffix “-ien,” which indicates belonging to a determined group. Le Pen, the fascist and racist leader of the National Front party, coined the expression, “français de souche,” 27 years ago. Recuperated by many politicians of all types of parties, this expression has been “normalized” and is employed widely in the French political vocabulary today. In the case that preoccupies us, this combination is not standardized in this language. The phrase can be translated as “French by lineage” and refers to the white French in opposition to the non-white French, children of colonial migrations.

⁴ In 2007, the spokesperson of the MIR (Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic), Houria Bouteldja, used the term “Souchiens” on a television program and this created a media scandal as some white French intellectuals in bad faith took advantage of a homonym and pretended her true intention was to say “sous-chiens” (sub-dogs). Houria Bouteldja later published a public response to these attacks.

⁵ The radio program France-culture.

⁶ In French, it literally means “sub-dogs,” from the prefix “sous” (sub-, infra-) and “chien” (dog).

⁷ On May 8, 1945, the troops of the French colonial army massacred thousands of Algerians that were peacefully demonstrating in the northeastern Algerian regions of Setif, Guelma y Jerrata.

⁸ In France, the “suburbs” are home to the marginalized neighborhoods of African, Arab, and Antillean communities that one would refer to in the U.S. as the ghettos, barrios or slums.

⁹ The original call for the formation of the Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic can be found at: <http://decolonialtranslation.com/AppelEng.php>