

Far-right figure commits suicide in Paris' Notre Dame to protest gay marriage

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Just after 4 p.m. on Tuesday, Dominique Venner, 78, a prominent figure in French far-right circles, shot himself dead in front of the altar in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

In a blog posted that day, headlined “The May 26 demo and Heidegger”, referring to an upcoming anti-gay marriage protest, Venner exhorted demonstrators not to ignore “the reality of African and North African immigration”. He went on, “Their [the demonstrators’] fight cannot be limited to the rejection of gay marriage” and warned of “the risk of seeing France fall into the hands of the Islamists.”

The Socialist Party (PS) majority passed the marriage-for-all law in the National Assembly, which was then put into force May 18 by President François Hollande. Hollande’s attacks on the living standards and rights of the working class, continuing those of his conservative predecessor Nicolas Sarkozy, have allowed reactionary forces in French society, including the far right and open fascists, to masquerade as defenders of the people, using the anti-gay marriage movement as a stalking horse.

Placards on the anti gay-marriage demonstration called on Hollande to withdraw the bill and for a referendum on the issue, glorifying the PME (Papa, Maman, Enfant [Father, Mother, Child]) family. Some called for Hollande to resign, citing France’s deteriorating economy. Others proclaimed: “We want work, not homo marriage”, “Take care of Aulnay [the PSA car factory slated for closure], not homo marriage.” Christine Boutin, president of the right-wing Christian Democratic Party, a minister under former conservative president Nicolas Sarkozy, played the populist demagogue with the press: “French people need work, French people need housing, they don’t need gay marriage. I’m telling the president of the

Republic: if you don’t listen to the people of France, they will revolt”.

Dominique Venner served with the French army in Algeria during the war for independence (1954-1962). On his return, he engaged in far-right politics, taking part in an attack on Communist Party headquarters in Paris in 1956. He joined the terrorist OAS paramilitary group, which fought for Algeria to remain French and tried to assassinate President Charles De Gaulle. Venner was jailed for 18 months for his OAS activities. Dropping organised political activity in 1970, he became a guru (historian, essayist) of the far right.

For months, protests have been organised against the Socialist Party government’s gay marriage legislation, on occasion gathering as many as 300,000 people. Their spokesperson, Catholic comedian Frigide Barjot (a play on Brigitte Bardot), has claimed that the movement is apolitical. Various Catholic and right-wing organisations have mobilised their followers, but the protests have also been actively supported by considerable sections of Sarkozy’s opposition UMP (Union for a Popular Movement), including its leader Jean-François Copé, who has often participated in the protests. He has announced his intention to do so again on May 26.

The movement spawned a far-right umbrella group called the “French Spring”, attempting to evoke the mass uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. A section of the neo-fascist National Front has been active in the movement, although party leader Marine Le Pen has kept her distance. Violent fascist groups on the protests have specialised in provoking the police.

Shortly after Venner’s suicide, the Catholic fundamentalist *Radio Courtoisie*, to which Venner was a regular contributor, broadcast his fascistic suicide message, a copy of which he had left by the altar in

Notre Dame. In language similar to that of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik, he claimed: “It will not be enough to organise tame street demonstrations” to achieve “the reconquest of the French and European memory of their identity ... It will certainly require new, spectacular and symbolic acts ... We are entering a period when words must be backed by deeds.”

The *Huffington Post* reported that “about a hundred far right activists and sympathisers assembled in front of Notre Dame ... at the foot of the equestrian statue of Charlemagne ... they held torches and the national flag.” After a brief speech in homage of Venner’s “last fight”, they sang military songs.

Barjot termed Venner’s suicide the act of a “deranged person”, asserting the latter was “part of a tiny, marginal minority” who want “violent, strong actions” and had criticised the anti-gay demonstrations for being “soft.”

PS deputy Jean-Christophe Cambadélis condemned Venner’s “political act”, coming just before the May 26 demonstration. He said it would “further stir up the part of the youth which is becoming radicalised”, adding that “[the UMP’s] Jean-François Copé must be aware of the conditions in which Sunday’s demonstration will take place and, particularly, will end.”

However, on Wednesday, UMP deputy Hervé Mariton refused to condemn Venner’s act outright: “I say a man died and I respect him. I don’t share all his ideas, there are some I can agree with and others I disagree with.”

Marine Le Pen declared: “All our respect for Dominique, whose last eminently political act will have been to try to rouse the people of France.” *Le Monde* judged that the suicide “electrified an already ominous atmosphere” and reported that on Wednesday, Barjot had said that she had received threats against her from the “far right” and had publicly asked Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls to strengthen security, adding that she might not participate in the May 26 protest.



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