

French campaign on violence against women intensifies police repression

Francis Dubois, Alex Lantier
1 December 2017

President Emmanuel Macron's announcement Saturday of a campaign to end violence against women marks a further shift to the right in his now six-month-old administration. His initiative comes amid the media campaign accusing US film producer Harvey Weinstein and other US celebrities of sexual crimes, and a media campaign in France encouraging women to denounce inappropriate or abusive sexual acts by men on Twitter.

The goal of this campaign is not to defend women's rights. It aims to stabilize the French political regime—which has been staggered by the disintegration of the two main big-business parties, the Socialist Party and The Republicans, and the collapse in the polls of Macron, now despised as the “president of the rich”—by building up censorship and the police.

Macron's proposal, as he himself put it, is to “reinforce our repressive arsenal.” He proposed to spend €420 million in 2018 on measures that include:

*Building a new “daily security police,” which would be focused on working class neighborhoods, and the creation of a “crime of sexist contempt” which would be “immediately punishable by a dissuasive fine.”

*Having the national Superior Audio-visual Council (CSA) censor the Internet to eliminate all content the state believes could “lead to violence against women.”

*Creating courses and activities to fight sexism among children in schools and nurseries.

*Increasing financing for medical and social care of battered women, and the creation of Internet communications systems allowing women to directly denounce sexual abuse to military police or local police from home.

Macron also promoted French imperialism's neo-colonial interventions in the Muslim world, giving them a feminist coloration by dedicating them to the struggle against female genital mutilation. He swore to “hunt down all those who practice this barbaric act,” and to pay

“particular attention to migrant women fleeing their country, because they are also trying to flee genital mutilation for themselves and their small daughters.”

Macron, who earlier denounced the majority of the French population that opposes his labor law decrees as “lazy,” began his speech on Saturday by denouncing the French people as sexist. “It is our entire society that is sick with sexism,” he declared, holding a minute of silence to commemorate the 123 women killed last year in France by their partner or ex-partner. He said the treatment of women in France should provoke “horror and shame.”

This presentation of the foreign and social policy of the French government is a grotesque travesty. What Macron is unleashing is a right-wing and repressive campaign that barely masks its hostility to the working class. The idea that France's Foreign Legion and its targeted assassination program will facilitate a moral crusade against female genital mutilation is absurd. As for refugees, which the European Union has left to drown in the Mediterranean by the thousands, they are fleeing decades of imperialist wars by France and its allies across the Middle East and Africa.

Within France itself, in the nightmarish vision laid out by Macron, only the army and the police, aided by state censorship, can protect women against an epidemic of sexual assault carried out by a male population that is uncontrollable and “sick” with misogyny.

This is a flagrant lie. According to the National Observatory of Violence Against Women, around 223,000 women (0.6 percent of France's female population) fall victim to sexual violence or assault by their domestic partners each year; 84,000 women (0.2 percent) are victims of rape or attempted rape. In 2014, law enforcement actually reported 82,635 cases of domestic assault, of which 88 percent targeted women, and 31,825 cases of sexual violence of which 85 percent targeted women.

These figures give a cold indication of social reality in a country devastated by falling living standards, mass unemployment and the obscene rise of the net worth of the billionaires. However, Macron's offensive denunciation of French sexism notwithstanding, the vast majority of the people are not engaged in criminal sexual conduct.

Macron's measures aim to whip up a right-wing atmosphere aimed at controlling the population via terror and humiliation. Young boys in elementary schools or even nurseries are to be told they must repress their own shameful sexist tendencies. The Paris subway is also becoming a venue for this campaign: a widely spread sign there declares, "Hands on buttocks are a crime punished by law, 5 YEARS IN PRISON—€75,000 FINE."

It is not to excuse inappropriate behavior, much less criminal sexual abuse, to observe that such signs have a chilling effect. Actions that take place in the course of normal, consensual sexual relations are now fraught with enormous social and legal risks. If either member of a couple decides to bring a lawsuit, his or her partner faces possible sentences that would ruin the professional future and the finances of the vast majority of workers.

Le Monde attacks the 1995 book of (female) historian Mona Ozouf, *The Words of Women*, which it said "contrasted the 'mild commerce' between the sexes supposedly existing in France, to the puritan traditions of American feminism that supposedly explained the 'war between the sexes' in the United States." For *Le Monde*, however, it is time to call off the truce in the war between the sexes. Current events, it said, "have exploded the rhetoric" of Ozouf.

Why does the ruling elite want France, which in the 20th century imported jazz and mass production from the United States, want to import puritanism in the 21st?

To answer this question, one must examine the political situation. Since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the European bourgeoisie has waged an escalating attack on basic social rights. After the European Union (EU) decimated health care and education in Greece and imposed wage cuts averaging 40 percent, Macron aims to impose a similar counterrevolution in France. Faced with deep social anger and a collapse of the traditional political parties, he wants to blow up the legal edifice of labor law and democratic rights as it emerged from World War II and the end of the Nazi Occupation.

Faced with mass anger among workers, Macron and the financial aristocracy are trying to divide the workers and

develop support among its remaining bases of support. It is appealing to the security forces and the milieu of petty-bourgeois Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), especially feminist NGOs whose budgets depend on the state subsidies laid out in Macron's plan.

Les Inrockuptibles gave a telling portrait of this anti-worker social layer, to which parties that emerged from the post-1968 student movement like the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) also belong. An *Inrockuptibles* journalist went to a café to watch the reaction to Macron's speech of members of "women's rights NGOs ... those who for several months have been contacting the president about the violence." Particularly since July, *Les Inrockuptibles* added, these forces have feared "a cut in funding to the NGOs."

Indifferent to democratic rights and essentially favorable to police repression, they agree with Macron's denunciation of French sexism and are intensely focused on obtaining funding: "Sitting on little clear-colored sofas, the young women are focused. ... From the get-go, the central question is posed by the first person to speak, who comes from the NGO world: that of the funding allocated by the state to associations for the defense of women. This budget is the central issue in the war, and it will be invoked constantly throughout the rest of the day."

According to the magazine, their conclusion after listening to Macron's speech was: "He's trying to make friends with us, but from the point of view of the budget it doesn't cut it."

To claim that the activities of Macron and of this social layer constitutes a defense of women is to perpetrate a political fraud, laying the basis for a broad shift to the right in official politics.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact