

# Macron whitewashes French state murder of Maurice Audin

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A crime that is confessed loudly and without consequence is no guarantee of future good conduct on the part of the criminal. This is the impression left by President Emmanuel Macron's admission last month that the French state tortured and murdered the young mathematician Maurice Audin in 1957 in Algiers, during the Algerian war, because of his political positions.

Before a raft of TV cameras, Macron personally gave Audin's widow a statement approved by the defense ministry. The statement admits that Audin was "tortured and then executed or tortured to death by the troops who had arrested him."

Macron then whitewashed the crime, claiming there was a juridical foundation for the mass torture and murder perpetrated by the French government during the Algerian war. Historians, he said, "all agree to recognize that Maurice Audin's death was made possible by a legally instituted system that favored disappearances and allowed torture for political ends."

This does not only mean that this confession should have no consequences for officers who carried out the repression in Algeria, such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the National Front (FN) and father of neofascist presidential candidate Marine Le Pen. If Macron insists that the juridical context of Audin's state murder was legal, it is because the emergency legislation of 1955-1956 that led to Audin's killing underpins Macron's policies of austerity and militarism today.

Macron and the preceding Socialist Party (PS) government imposed laws authorizing mass spying and the labor law that suspends the Labor Code during the 2015-2017 state of emergency. The National Assembly had created the state of emergency in 1955 specifically to crush the movement against French colonial rule in Algeria. The 1955 law was part of a raft of emergency

measures adopted at the time, including the 1956 "special powers" decree, that encouraged torture and murder.

"This system unfortunately was the source of acts that were sometimes terrible, including torture," Macron said. "By failing to prevent and punish the use of torture, successive governments endangered the survival of the men and women detained by the security forces. Yet in the final analysis, it is with them [the military-police apparatus] that rests the responsibility for the safekeeping of human rights and, first of all, the physical integrity of those detained under their sovereignty."

This is the outlook of the president of a police state, not of a democratic republic. Woe betide those countries that grant unchecked and absolute powers to the police, hoping to save their rights; they have only ever gotten bloody dictatorships in return. The task of defending democratic rights against the state and the ruling classes falls not to the police, but to the population and above all to the working class.

Audi's murder is a warning about the implications of imperialist war that echoes still 60 years later, as France and NATO wage wars from Mali across the Middle East all the way to Afghanistan. The attempts of the most powerful capitalist states to dominate countries and entire regions by force is criminal and reactionary all down the line. It implicates imperialist states, whether or not they are formally parliamentary-democratic, in crimes against foreign peoples and their own citizens.

Audin died under the parliamentary regime set up in France after World War II, as General Massu, to whom Guy Mollet's social-democratic government had granted arbitrary powers, occupied Algiers at the head of a division of paratroopers. Audin, a member of the

Algerian Communist Party, supported Algerian independence even though the French Stalinist sister party, the PCF, supported Mollet and the special powers. In June 1957, Massu and his adjunct, Paul Aussaresses, had Audin arrested, tortured, and murdered.

This murder symbolized the broader criminality of a war that claimed a half million lives. Of Algeria's population of 10 million at the time, France detained 3 million in internment camps. Also, 25,000 French troops died during the war, and 60,000 were wounded. Of the 1.5 million French troops who participated in the war, mostly young draftees, many came back lastingly traumatized by what they had seen and done.

The war revealed French imperialism for what it is. Barely a decade after World War II, in an attempt to maintain its neocolonial pillage of the Maghreb, the French bourgeoisie committed many of the crimes the Nazi Gestapo had committed in occupied France. Thousands of former SS soldiers or "Prussian knights" of the Nazi army, recruited into the French Foreign Legion, fought in French colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria.

Since then, successive French governments, both right-wing and social democratic, coldly denied the state's responsibility for Audin's murder, in order to whitewash imperialism and militarism before French and world opinion. But for masses of youth and workers at the time, the crimes committed in Algeria deeply discredited the French capitalist regime set up under the leadership of De Gaulle and the Stalinists after World War II.

The "model" of the battle of Algiers, that is to say mass arrests and torture, was followed internationally. At Fort Bragg, Aussaresses taught counterinsurgency strategies to the US armed forces used in Latin America and in Vietnam during the CIA's bloody Operation Phoenix. He explained there that "in a revolutionary war, the enemy is the population," and that torture victims should be "executed." At the same time, a broad antiwar movement was developing among youth around the world against the Vietnam War.

The official reception in France to Macron's speech on Audin is a warning: it is urgent to build a new movement against war and dictatorship. In the 50 years since the May-June 1968 French general strike, the anti-Trotskyism and growing affluence of those recruited

from the post-1968 student movement into the leading ranks of the "left" parties has shifted official political life far to the right. Now, the political establishment and the media close ranks instinctively and immediately to defend the police state that Macron is building. *Le Monde* hailed Macron's statement under the headline, "Algerian War, Macron's historic gesture." It cited historian Benjamin Stora—a former member of Pierre Lambert's *Organisation communiste internationaliste*, a party that opposed the Algerian war before it broke with Trotskyism and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1971. Stora enthused that Macron is "in the great tradition of decisions of historical recognition." *Libération* for its part saluted the "most ambitious gesture of memory since Macron's election."

The PCF hailed Macron's gesture with joy. PCF National Secretary Pierre Laurent saluted a "historic victory for truth and justice," and the Stalinist daily *L'Humanité* hailed "a magnificent victory."

The Clear Tendency faction of the Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), which supported French imperialism's "humanitarian" wars in Libya and Syria, wrote that Macron's call "represents a magnificent victory" and is "at the level of what is expected." It applauded *L'Humanité* for its "combat for the truth" and attributed to Macron's statement "a great historic and political weight."

The *Parti de l'égalité socialiste* draws fundamentally opposed conclusions to those of the lackeys of French imperialism. The example of the Algerian war points to the necessity to build a mass movement against war in the international working class, based on a Trotskyist program. And as official circles reinforce mass spying and far-right parties across Europe, Audin's murder points to the necessity to oppose states of emergency and police-state rule.



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