

France's ruling parties launch anti-Muslim campaign against sports veil

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On Tuesday evening, the French-based sports clothing retailer Décathlon announced that it could not proceed with plans to place on sale an Islamic sports veil, designed to be worn while jogging, at stores in France. The cancellation came in response to a three-day-long campaign of racist and anti-Muslim hysteria by the French political establishment, demanding the banning of the item. It resulted in the mobilization of fascist layers to threaten the company and its employees.

Lydia Guirgous, a spokeswoman for the right wing The Republicans (LR), launched the campaign on February 24, after a marketing blogger announced the upcoming release of the veil. Guirgous tweeted: “Décathlon is submitting itself to both #Islamism that only tolerates women whose heads are covered by a hijab to secure their place in the Ummah, and to men. Décathlon is thus renouncing the values of our civilization upon the altar of the market and communalist marketing.”

The Tweet triggered a deluge of anti-Muslim statements in the political establishment, some employing the same absurd and fraudulent pretext that they were seeking to defend women by banning the sale of a religious garment.

Valérie Rabault, the Socialist Party (PS) deputy in the National Assembly for Tarn-et-Garonne tweeted: “Boycott Décathlon in France?” Former PS minister Laurence Rossignol published a foul joint communiqué by the League of International Womens’ Rights and the Secular Republic Committee, denouncing Décathlon as a “promoter of sexual apartheid.”

Valérie Boyer, the LR deputy for Bouches-du-Rhone, said she was “revolted to see this French company choosing to prolong the sexual apartheid imposed on women in public spaces.”

The attacks escalated the next day, after Décathlon tweeted in reply to Guirgous that “the hijab was needed by certain runners, and we responded to this sporting demand.” The item is already on sale in Morocco.

The Macron government publicly joined the campaign on Tuesday morning. Solidarity and Health Minister Agnes Buzyn said, in an interview with RTL, “I would prefer that a French brand not promote the veil. It’s not outlawed, but nonetheless, this is a vision of women that I don’t share. I find that it does not correspond to the values of our country.” Another spokesperson for the governing party in the National Assembly, Aurore Bergé, tweeted that she would “no longer place trust in a brand that breaks with our values.”

The same morning, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, of the right-wing Stand Up France! party, was invited for a TV interview on France2, where he declared that he did not intend to allow his two young daughters to grow up in a country like Saudi Arabia, and demanded a boycott of Décathlon.

Just a week ago, Stand Up France! was forced to withdraw the candidacy of Emmanuelle Gave in the European elections, after news outlets published her social media posts, one of which said there were “too many blacks in the 100 meter race” and the other that “muslims are totally unacceptable as housekeepers or nannies.”

The extreme-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen published a communiqué the same day, denouncing the “latest intrusion of Islamic communalism into public spaces.” While welcoming the anti-Muslim crusade by the Socialist Party and others, it demanded an end to what it called the “policies of massive immigration that are the most undoubted causes of sectarianism.”

The outpouring of filth had its intended effect, with a

mobilization of fascistic layers to threaten the company and its employees. Décathlon tweeted that “Our customer services have received over 500 calls and emails since this morning. Our staff have been insulted and threatened, sometimes physically.”

Décathlon published extracts of various anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic messages it received. One stated: “Rotten gang. Money has no smell. You betray the values of the French Republic. Shame on you for contributing to the Islamist invasion. You’ll end up like the riff-raff in the ovens in Poland.” Another asked whether the company planned on marketing “explosive belts.”

On Tuesday evening, Décathlon announced it was withdrawing the product indefinitely “in the face of the violent polemic it has triggered” and “out of concern to guarantee the safety of our staff.”

The Republicans deputy Lydia Guirons tweeted gleefully in response that the “mobilization of citizens” who uphold “the values of our civilization has won. I am happy that Décathlon is retreating from the sale of the hijab. It is a wise decision. The struggle against Islamism is a fight at every moment.”

This disgusting operation exposes the fraudulent character of the official campaign against “anti-Semitism” mounted by every one of the parties who whipping up this anti-Muslim propaganda. It has nothing to do with opposing anti-Semitism, and everything to do with slandering growing left-wing opposition to social inequality in the working class as anti-Semitic and fascistic.

An effort is underway to downplay the indissoluble connection between anti-Semitism and fascism, and to associate anti-Semitism with socialist opposition to capitalism. As the past week’s events demonstrate, the campaign over anti-Semitism is being used to strengthen Le Pen’s National Rally and other fascistic forces with the promotion of anti-Muslim hysteria.

The entire political establishment is shifting rapidly to the right in response to a leftward movement of the working class, which has found only an initial expression in the “yellow vest” protests.

In a speech last Wednesday, Macron repeatedly warned about the growth of “radical Islam” and called for stepped up policing of working-class neighborhoods. “This ideology grows like gangrene in certain suburbs,” he said, calling for a “Republican

conquest of these territories.”

The French political establishment has long utilized campaigns against the Muslim veil as a means of inciting anti-Islamic xenophobia and justifying attacks on democratic rights directed against the entire working class. In 2010, two years after the onset of the global financial crash and the initiation of austerity across Europe, President Sarkozy introduced a ban on full facial coverings with the support of the Socialist Party.

In their campaign, the ruling elite can largely count on the complicit silence of what passes for the French left, which has supported or accommodated itself to veil bans.

Jean-luc Mélenchon, the leader of the La France Insoumise (LFI), has remained silent amid the anti-Muslim campaign. No statement is available on the web site of LFI—much of which has supported the *Aufstehen* movement of Sahra Wagenknecht in the German Left Party, which has discussed allying with the anti-Muslim Pegida movement. Mélenchon’s Facebook and Twitter pages are silent on the Décathlon affair, as is the website of *Lutte ouvrière* (LO), a longstanding supporter of the veil ban.



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