#MeToo launches fascistic attack on Polanski's film *J'accuse*

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The #MeToo campaign has launched a vitriolic attack on Roman Polanski's cinematic masterpiece on the Dreyfus Affair, *J'accuse* (English title: *An Officer and a Spy*). With the full support of France's banker-president, Emmanuel Macron, its supporters are working to brand Polanski as a rapist, denounce viewers or supporters of *J'accuse* as rape apologists and suppress the film.

The defining characteristic of this reactionary effort is its contempt for the historical, political and one might add moral issues bound up with the monumental 1894-1906 legal battle to clear a French-Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, framed on charges of spying for Germany. *J'accuse* currently tops the French box office, with over a half-million tickets sold in its first week of showings. Yet #MeToo advocates are aggressively campaigning against this great work of art, and aligning themselves with far-right positions.

#MeToo supporters rallied at a theater in Paris on November 12, brandishing signs reading "J'accuse [I accuse] the rapist Polanski," and shut down a pre-screening of the film. Since the launch of the film in France on November 13, they have blocked other screenings in the Paris area, in Rennes, Saint Nazaire, Bordeaux, Caen and other cities. A widely publicized slogan of #MeToo demonstrators against *J'accuse* is "Polanski rapist, cinemas guilty, viewers complicit!"

Leading actors have been forced to cancel appearances to promote the film, as #MeToo supporters have attempted to block all such efforts. Jean Dujardin was prevented from publicizing *J'accuse* on TF1 television, and Emmanuelle Seigner was forced to abandon an appearance on France Inter.

#MeToo supporters and elected officials are trying to impose local bans on the film. Initially, Socialist Party (PS) official Gérald Cosme announced a ban on the film in the Seine Saint-Denis department north of Paris. Cosme was forced to retract the ban, however, after an outcry from film directors and movie theater staff, who announced they would defy the ban.

Stéphane Goudet, the director of the Le Meliès theater in Seine Saint-Denis, addressed a Facebook post to Cosme, stating: "We demand from officials immediately a letter on the film directors we no longer have the right to show and the definition of their criteria. Is a committee of verification of artistic morality planned, as the democratic freedom of filmgoers is no longer sufficient?" Goudet asked if famous artists including the novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline and the painters Caravaggio and Paul Gauguin were also henceforth banned.

Nonetheless, the #MeToo campaign has continued its hysterical attacks on the film, posting flyers with pictures of Polanski titled "Unpunished pedo-criminal." Disgracefully, France's guild of authors, directors and producers (ARP) has announced plans to suspend Polanski, after he has directed what is arguably his most significant work in a decades-long career.

Top officials of the Macron government are inciting and supporting this foul campaign. Minister for Equality between Women and Men Marlène Schiappa on November 13, and then government spokeswoman Sibeth Ndiaye the following day, declared they would not see *J'accuse*. Ndiaye said that she could not view Polanski's film because she does "not share much with a man facing such accusations."

Former Minister of Families, Children and Women's Rights Laurence Rossignol effectively called for a boycott of the film, arguing that viewing it is "to offer [Polanski] narcissistic retribution." While she said she would not call for the "outlawing" of *J'accuse*, she said that given the rape allegations against Polanski, "Going to see the film is to throw in the towel."

The claim that to show, view or support *J'accuse* is to endorse or excuse rape is a monumental and horrific slander. *J'accuse* is not a film about rape, sex or Polanski. It is a faithful recounting of the struggle against a state cover-up aimed at keeping the innocent Dreyfus in prison, waged over the course of years by Colonel Georges Picquart, ultimately together with world-famous novelist Émile Zola and left-wing political figures.

The Dreyfus Affair eventually engulfed the entire French state machine and army general staff, nearly bringing down the national government. The country teetered on the brink of civil war. The affair separated France into two great camps, the pro-*dreyfusards* —in which the decisive force was the working class socialist movement led by Jean Jaurès—and the *antidreyfusards*, whose leading proponent was the anti-Semitic *Action française* of Charles Maurras. It was one of the

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important, early victories in the 20th century of the workers movement against the fascist forces that would later carry out the genocide of European Jewry during World War II.

The claim that to be moved by such a powerful film is to be a rape apologist is disgusting and reactionary. Given the enormous historical and political significance of these questions, it is tantamount to a neo-fascistic appeal to racism, anti-Semitism and anti-working class hatred.

The French state's encouragement and incitement of the #MeToo campaign against *J'accuse* is bound up with its agenda of military-police repression, social austerity and appeals to extreme-right sentiment. Last year, Macron hailed Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as a "great soldier," appealing to far-right riot police units as they launched the largest mass arrests in France since the Nazi Occupation against the "yellow vest" protests.

Having endorsed Pétain, the Macron government is now seeking to block honest discussion of the Dreyfus Affair and adopting a hostile attitude toward Polanski's film in support of Dreyfus. This is because Pétain's Vichy regime had as its main base of support far-right groups founded by the *antidreyfusards*, the *Action française* and Maurras chief among them. Last year, powerful forces at Macron's culture ministry sought, ultimately unsuccessfully, to bring out the complete works of Maurras.

The anti-Semite Maurras began his career by hailing false documents prepared against Dreyfus as "absolute truth." After these documents were discredited in the 1899 retrial of Dreyfus, he defended them anyway, declaring he intended to "substitute what was desirable for sad reality." That is, since he, the army general staff and the Church *desired* to keep Dreyfus in prison, he would continue to defend the charges against the Jewish officer even though he knew they were lies.

At the end of his career, Maurras hailed the French general staff's sudden capitulation to the Nazis in 1940 and Pétain's coming to power as a "divine surprise." *Action française* members then oversaw Vichy's Jewish policy, which led to the deportation of over 70,000 Jews from France to death camps in Germany and Poland. When he was condemned to life in prison for high treason after World War II and the fall of Vichy, Maurras cried out: "This is the revenge of Dreyfus!"

To understand not only the history but also the politics of our era, it is vital there be an honest, open and uncensored public discussion of these issues.

The intervention of the #MeToo campaign goes, however, in an entirely opposite direction—towards censorship based on unsubstantiated allegations, and the degradation of public debate in line with the interests, in the final analysis, of the financial aristocracy.

The pretext for the campaign against *J'accuse* was the publication in *Le Parisien*, on November 9, of allegations by photographer and former actress Valentine Monnier that Polanski raped her in 1975, when she was 18, in Gstaad, Switzerland. For 44 years, Monnier made no public statement about the alleged incident, for which the statute of limitations has expired. She presented no evidence to support her allegation, which Polanski strenuously denied through his lawyer.

Monnier explained this silence by claiming she had forgotten about being raped but remembered the episode when she heard that *J'accuse* was coming out. "The body often communicates what the mind has buried, until age or an event brings back a traumatic memory," she said. The trigger, she claimed, was Polanski's film: "Can it be tolerated, on the pretext of a film, under cover of History, to hear someone say *J'accuse* who branded you with hot iron, whereas you, the victim, cannot accuse him?"

The #MeToo campaign against *J'accuse* is based on false premises and unsubstantiated accusations. Monnier did not, as she implied, suddenly go to the press this month immediately after remembering she had been raped, shocked by trailers of the upcoming release of *J'accuse*. In fact, her statement and the #MeToo campaign were carefully prepared in discussions with French and US authorities over several years.

Polanski pleaded guilty in Los Angeles in 1977 to unlawful sex with a minor, Samantha Geimer, and spent 42 days in prison for psychiatric examination under a plea deal. However, he fled the United States when a judge, anxious to burnish his reputation as tough on crime, made himself guilty of gross misconduct by announcing that he would scrap the plea deal and sentence Polanski to 50 years in prison. While Geimer has since said that she forgives Polanski and repeatedly called on the media to drop its relentless campaign, US authorities are still vindictively pursuing him to obtain his extradition for political reasons.

Monnier said nothing of her allegations about a 1975 rape during the 1977 events. The first known mention she made of the alleged 1975 incident was in January 2018 when, inspired by the #MeToo movement targeting of Harvey Weinstein, she sent letters to Schiappa, French First Lady Brigitte Macron and the Los Angeles Police Department. Monnier "wrote again in 2019 about the Ministry of Culture's financing of Roman Polanski's film," the first lady's office said.

That such an operation would become the basis of an attempt to censor a major work of art testifies to the deeply anti-democratic character of the Macron government and its political allies. As for the #MeToo campaign, it is unmasked by its engagement in favor of censorship in line with a government seeking to promote the heritage of fascism.

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