

Quebec court acquits fascist who led mob in threatening journalists

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A Quebec court acquitted Raphaël Lévesque, the founder and leader of Atalante, a far-right anti-immigration group based in Quebec City, on June 10.

Lévesque had been charged with break-in, harassment, intimidation and mischief following an act of provocation and intimidation on May 23, 2018, when he and six other Atalante members invaded the Montreal offices of Vice Media. With the exception of Lévesque, the men all wore masks bearing the *fleur de lys* (the national symbol of Quebec). They delivered a “2018 trash media” award to journalist Simon Coutu, throwing clown noses and leaflets around the premises. According to the prosecutor, the leaflets depicted blood dripping from the word “Vice.”

Atalante targeted Vice Media for being “extreme left.” In particular, Lévesque denounced Coutu for inciting “a war” after the latter had published a series of articles on the Vice website reporting on clashes in the streets of Montreal and Quebec City between Atalante (and other far-right groups) and so-called “Antifas”. Atalante’s stunt was clearly intended to bully and intimidate Coutu and send a message to the entire media that writing articles critical of Quebec’s ultra-right is a risky business.

In a judgement that defied the facts and displays sympathy for the far-right, Judge Joëlle Roy of the Court of Quebec concluded “that no criminal act had been committed.” She stated that Lévesque’s actions were “justified and legitimate” and were an example of freedom of expression, since the accused had “delivered a message and communicated information” without “intent to threaten or intimidate.”

Demonstrating the absurdity of her own conclusions, the judge cautioned that her judgment was not a “licence to reproduce” such behaviour. But if Lévesque’s actions were truly non-criminal and legitimate, the judge would clearly be out of order in counseling that they not be repeated.

In order to be able to render such a judgment, Judge Roy ensured that the most damning information about Lévesque was not admitted as evidence at the trial. She denied the Crown prosecutor the right to expose or even make reference to Lévesque’s violent neo-Nazi beliefs.

It should also be noted that according to Lévesque, the Quebec City police officers who arrested him in 2018 were sympathetic and expressed surprise that his actions could be considered criminal.

Atalante was formed by Lévesque in 2015, supposedly in

reaction to the “migratory subversion” of Quebec, particularly, the arrival of Muslims fleeing the misery caused in their countries of origin by the wars of American imperialism, in which its Canadian partner invariably collaborates.

The group’s ideology is based on the work of Julius Evola—an Italian fascist writer who is also admired by Stephen Bannon, a former top advisor of President Trump—and on the writings of French far-right author Dominique Venner, a fanatical anti-communist. Venner committed suicide on May 21, 2013 at the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris to protest against the “great replacement” of the French and European peoples by immigrants.

Like Venner and the other fascist groups he inspired, Atalante calls itself “revolutionary nationalist.” Its members are virulent opponents of immigration, propose “re-migration” (the forcible return of all immigrants to their countries of origin), and denounce globalization and socialists.

To camouflage its extreme right-wing character, the group presents a sanitized public image free of explicit hate language. Atalante also carries out actions aimed at giving it a veneer of acceptability. For example, its members distribute food to homeless people living on the streets of Quebec City, provided they are “French-Canadians”.

Atalante specializes in provocative actions, particularly the installation of banners with anti-immigration slogans in Quebec City and Montreal, the organization of demonstrations to “mobilize the [Quebec] nation,” and commemorations of events or people deemed emblematic of the “French-Canadian nation.”

This overview of Atalante’s activities demonstrates the absurdity of the claims of the lawyer representing Lévesque, and implicitly endorsed by Judge Roy, that he and his group are “apolitical.”

Finally, Atalante operates a boxing club to which its members must belong. In an interview given to Nomos-tv, a YouTube channel aimed at Quebec’s far right, Lévesque admitted, with a smile on his face, that the purpose of this combat training is so that Atalante can “defend its ideas on the ground in a climate that is increasingly hostile to nationalists.”

Lévesque was associated with the neo-Nazi movement in Quebec and Europe long before Atalante was founded. In 2009, under the name Raf Stomper, he founded the music group *Légitime violence* (Violence is legit), of which he is the singer and leader. The musical “work” of Lévesque/Stomper is a debauchery of violence, anti-communism and anti-Semitism. Among the lyrics

composed by Lévesque/Stomper are: “These effeminate leftists/ Who allow themselves to criticize us/ Will never dare to confront us/ We’ll stab them all.”

Between 2010 and 2015, the band was the subject of much controversy. It drew criticism for having participated in a neo-Nazi concert in France. In Quebec, the band’s performance at the alternative music festival Envol et Macadam in 2011 was cancelled after it was revealed that the band, at the initiative of its leader Lévesque/Stomper, was playing openly anti-Semitic songs with lyrics such as “Unroll the barbed wire, Prepare Zyklon B!” (the gas used in Nazi extermination camps).

While Lévesque’s violent, anti-Semitic and racist ideas and actions are manifestly relevant elements to consider in a trial for intimidation, Judge Roy ruled all the information we have just outlined inadmissible.

She refused to admit into evidence the lyrics of songs from Légitime violence, on the absurd pretext that the musical performances of the accused man under the name Raf Stomper were no different from those of an actor who plays a Mafioso in a movie, but is not violent in everyday life.

Judge Roy also forbade the Crown prosecutor from mentioning the resemblance between the Atalante logo and the SS logo, insisting that evoking Nazi genocide “without proof” is one of the things “that cannot be said in a courtroom.”

The lengths to which the judge went, and the language she used, in preventing the prosecutor from exposing the political background to the case and the defendant’s noxious views were so out of the ordinary in a Canadian court they were the subject of shocked commentary from mainstream media reporters covering the trial.

Judge Roy’s ruling and behaviour are bound up with the rapid intensification of class conflict. In Quebec, throughout Canada, and around the world, the capitalist ruling elite is embracing reaction and cultivating the extreme right as a weapon against the working class, because it fears that the immense social tensions generated by social inequality, and exacerbated by the health and socio-economic disaster triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, are fueling the growth of a mass anti-capitalist movement.

In Germany, the return to militarism advocated by all political parties, including the Greens and the Left Party, is opposed by the majority of the German population, and can only be imposed through recourse to far-right forces, a shift towards more authoritarian forms of rule, and a trivialization of the worst crimes of German imperialism, including those of the Third Reich. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has been continuously promoted by the political establishment and now dictates the policies of the Grand Coalition government, especially in regards to immigration and refugees.

In the United States, President Trump is seeking to mobilize the most backward elements as a social base for a frontal assault on the living conditions and democratic rights of working people. He declared in 2017 that the neo-Nazis and white supremacists who took part in the Charlottesville demonstration, in which one of them killed a counterdemonstrator, were “very fine people.” More recently, Trump threatened to deploy the US military on American soil to violently suppress the mass protests that erupted following

the police murder of George Floyd.

Canada is no exception to this global trend. In Quebec, all political parties have adopted a narrative that portrays immigration as a threat to “Quebec values”—starting with the so-called “reasonable accommodation” debate, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, and the Charter of Quebec Values promoted by the Parti Québécois government of Pauline Marois. (See: **How Quebec Solidaire abetted the rise of anti-Muslim chauvinism**)

This, along with the prominent role the extreme right now plays in European politics (Marine Le Pen in France, the AfD in Germany, etc.) and Trump’s election, has encouraged far-right nationalist forces in Quebec, such as Atalante or La Meute, to intensify their public activity. A similar phenomenon is taking place in English Canada, with anti-immigrant and anti-worker protests being organized by forces such as United We Roll and the self-styled Yellow Vest group. (See: **Canadian oil refinery boss lauds George Floyd protests while employing state violence against locked out workers**)

The election of the hard-right Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government in 2018 has only accelerated this trend. Since coming to power, Quebec Premier François Legault, a multi-millionaire former Air Transat CEO, has adopted a series of measures against immigrants and religious minorities. In the spring of 2019, the CAQ passed a “secularism law” that prohibits women wearing face-covering Islamic veils from receiving vital public services, and women who wear the hijab from teaching in public schools. Then, last fall, the government lowered the annual number of immigrants admitted to Quebec by 20,000 and introduced new discriminatory admission criteria related to knowledge of “Quebec values.”

Gripped by fear that the growing anti-capitalist sentiment among young people and workers will develop into a mass challenge to the profit system, the ruling elite is cultivating the extreme right for use as shock troops against the working class. This is the political context that explains the acquittal of a notorious fascist by a Quebec court.



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