

Pro-police #MeToo campaign targets French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin

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The #MeToo campaign against Gérald Darmanin over rape allegations has intensified since he became interior minister this month. The Greens, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI), the Socialist Party (PS) and the right-wing Republicans (LR) have all called for his resignation.

It should be stated from the outset that there is nothing progressive about this campaign. There is deep anger among workers at European governments' homicidal return-to-work policy amid the pandemic, bank bailouts, austerity, mass death and suffering, and police repression of popular protests. Under these conditions, the focus on Darmanin's alleged sexual misconduct aims to divert this growing opposition away from a struggle against French and European capitalism, behind a campaign based on gender politics and support for the police state.

The allegations relate to events that occurred in 2009. The accusation was made eight years later, shortly after Darmanin became a minister in the Macron administration. His accuser, Sophie Patterson-Spatz, sent him text messages stating that she had slept with him so that he would use his influence to clear her criminal record. Prosecutors formally dropped the investigation three times in 2017-2018, stating there is no evidence the sexual encounter was not consensual. Darmanin has never been tried, let alone convicted of anything related to the case.

A manifesto for the sexual misconduct campaign appeared in *Libération* on July 23, entitled, "Gérald Darmanin must quit the ministry of the interior." It was written by Claire Monod and Sophie Taillé-Polian of Generation.S, a recent PS split-off, and signed by Manon Aubry and Clémentine Aubry of LFI, and female leaders of the Greens, the Stalinist French Communist Party, and the Socialist Party.

"Gerald Darmanin is presumed innocent," they write. "But how to justify the promotion to the Interior of a

minister accused in a preliminary investigation for rape, harassment and abuse of weakness and whose lawyers do not dispute the facts but their legal interpretation?" Darmanin's elevation had created an "indignation that transcends Republican political divisions," they add.

They conclude: "The republican police deserve better than this nomination, and women in politics as elsewhere will not be silenced any longer! Gérald Darmanin cannot remain interior minister."

In other words, Darmanin's removal is necessary for the moral cleansing of the French state, dripping in blood shed in wars from Afghanistan to Syria and Mali, and his replacement by someone who lives up to the high moral standards of the French police!

It would be difficult to find a clearer self-indictment of the right-wing character of #MeToo opponents of Darmanin, their alignment with imperialism and their hostility to the working class. The police forces they hail have spent the past two years blowing off hands, shooting out eyes, arresting and beating countless "yellow vest" protesters and striking workers, both men and women, and rounding up immigrants.

What is particularly striking about the #MeToo campaign against Darmanin is that its leaders avoid, and in fact attempt to conceal, the police-state policies Darmanin and the Macron administration are pursuing.

Last Monday, Darmanin announced he would sue the Green mayor of Colombes, Patrick Chaimovitch, for having raised the historical links between the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime and the French police of today. The decision, demanded by far-right police unions, effectively criminalizes historically-informed criticism of the police or fascism in France.

On Tuesday, Darmanin declared in a fascistic speech to a commission in the National Assembly that he "chokes" whenever he hears the words "police violence." He stated: "I do not think it's necessary to compare types of

violence. Some are legitimate—this is the exercise of force by the police—and some are illegitimate—that is the exercise of force by people who are not police or gendarmes.” In other words, brutal police violence is legitimate, because it is the police who are doing it.

The replacement of Darmanin with a figure supported by the #MeToo campaign against him, whether male or female, would not change these policies one iota. An examination of this tawdry case explodes the claim that #MeToo is defending women against Darmanin.

In May 2009, Darmanin was approached by Sophie Spatz (born Olga Patterson), then 36 years old, at the Paris offices of the ruling, right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (UMP, today LR). Patterson-Spatz was a former prostitute and UMP member. Darmanin was then a 25-year-old UMP municipal councilor in Tourcoing.

Patterson-Spatz requested Darmanin’s help to clear her criminal record, which included convictions for blackmail and making threatening calls to a former boyfriend. That night, Patterson-Spatz and Darmanin had dinner at a restaurant, went to a swingers club in central Paris, and stayed the night together at a hotel. Six months later, in November 2009, Darmanin asked then-Justice Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie to look into Patterson-Spatz’s case.

The two continued to exchange text messages until 2012. One of Patterson-Spatz’s messages, sent on December 17, 2009, and subsequently leaked to the media, states that she slept with Darmanin so he would assist in her case. She wrote: “Abuse one’s position !! in my view this is being a jerk!! Above all when one is in pain, politics suits you well! When you know the effort that I had to go through to sleep with you !!!! for you to look into my case.”

Darmanin replied: “You’re right. I am a jerk. How can I ask you to forgive me?”

Darmanin climbed the ranks, becoming a deputy in the National Assembly in 2012. In 2017, after Macron was elected president, Darmanin was named minister of public action and accounts. Within two days of his nomination, Patterson-Spatz’s husband, Pierre Spatz, sent a letter to the minister of justice accusing Darmanin of rape, abuse of his powers, and exploiting a person in desperate condition.

A criminal investigation was opened in June 2017, but the case was dropped by prosecutors on July 11, 2017, because Patterson-Spatz refused police requests for an interview. It was reopened in January 2018, when she wrote to prosecutors requesting an interview, but was dropped again the following month.

Prosecutors explained the decision in a brief note published February 16, stating that “the investigation did not establish the absence of consent of the plaintiff nor give evidence of any constraint, threat, surprise or violence against her.” French law requires “violence, constraint, threats or surprise” for an act to constitute rape.

Patterson-Spatz has since filed a second accusation, this time in civil rather than criminal court. This second case has been dropped and reopened on appeal.

Given these events, accepted by both parties, the accusation of rape against Darmanin is manifestly baseless. Patterson-Spatz’s lawyer has claimed that Darmanin’s promise to help her was the “preparatory element of a rape by surprise,” though the two went from dinner to a swingers’ club to a hotel and Patterson-Spatz subsequently sent him text messages acknowledging her consent.

Those who argue that it is irrelevant if the accusation is true, because Darmanin is a reactionary who should in any case be removed, are either deluding themselves or others. The attack on the presumption of innocence invariably strengthens the state and its repressive powers targeting the working population.

The #MeToo-style campaign against Darmanin is voicing demands of a privileged section of the middle class that is hostile to a struggle against Macron and the capitalist system, but wants a greater distribution of positions in the state and corporations for a narrow layer of affluent women.

The growing opposition in the working class to Macron’s policies is along completely different lines—for social equality and democratic rights, and against poverty, austerity, war, and police-state rule. The political establishment, including the #MeToo movement, is hostile to this *class* opposition to Macron and wants to divide and demoralize it using gender and racial politics. This is the driving force behind the moralizing #MeToo campaign against Darmanin.



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