

Macron's anti-Islamic separatism law: The death throes of French democracy

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On Friday, President Emmanuel Macron announced that Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin would introduce a draft bill against “separatism” on December 9. Facing mounting opposition over the anti-constitutional character of the proposed law, which openly targets Islam, the government announced on Tuesday that it would instead be presented as a bill on secularism.

Throughout the 21st century, the French ruling class has, under the cover of defending secularism, promoted vicious anti-Muslim propaganda, trampling democratic rights underfoot. After banning Islamic headscarves from being worn in public schools in 2004, it banned the burqa in public places in 2010. These laws tear up the secular principle of state neutrality in religious affairs. They forced the exodus of hundreds of young girls from schools, and encouraged police violence against women wearing the burqa and their families.

With the introduction of its “anti-separatist” bill, the “secular” mask of the campaign by the government of Prime Minister Jean Castex has fallen off, revealing its pro-imperialist and fascist anti-Muslim face.

The draft bill, as it is presented by Macron, will undermine the 1905 law on secularism and install a police state. It would enforce direct state control over the Muslim religion and complete surveillance of French territory by the police and intelligence agencies, and require an oath of allegiance to “Republican values” by all associations, as defined by the Interior ministry. The state intends to point an accusing finger at Islam and the working class suburbs, viciously persecuted by the media and police.

Macron has presented a thinly-veiled version of extreme-right anti-Muslim hysteria, accusing “radical Islam” of wanting to conquer France. He denounced “a profound crisis” of Islam which would provoke “Islamic separatism ... which is expressed in repeated divergences from the values of the Republic.” He accused Islam of “radicalism

in the negation, for example, of equality between men and women” and a radicalisation “sometimes leading to jihad.”

He added : “There is in this radical Islam ... an open and proclaimed desire, a methodically organized intention to flout the laws of the Republic and create a parallel order, install other values, develop another organisation of society, separatist at first, but whose final objective is to take complete control of it. And this is what gradually leads to a rejection of freedom of speech, of conscience, the right to blasphemy.”

Apart from a reference to the terrorist attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 by the Islamic State, which said it was taking revenge for the magazine's caricatures of Mohammed, Macron denounced the private schools where young girls attend wearing veils.

Macron maintained a deafening silence about the facts surrounding the 2015 terrorist attacks. They were prepared while France was supporting Islamic State terrorist operations against the Syrian government and financing the same militia through the Lafarge cement corporation. His reference to terrorist attacks in France is aimed at blackguarding Islam in general, and women who wear the headscarf, in particular.

Macron proposed that the government ban Islamic schools where girls are allowed to wear the headscarf, and demanded the compulsory education of children in state schools from the age of three. He also called for the state to train and directly control French imams and choir leaders in order to break all official and financial links between Islam in France and foreign countries.

However, he implied that in order to avoid right-wing demonstrations, private Christian schooling would not be submitted to any further regulation. According to Macron, “educational freedom is important in our Republic and it is out of the question to call it into question, and to revive passions that our country has already lived through and

that would be counterproductive.”

Macron and the Interior minister want to transform the Muslim community, which to a very large extent is composed of oppressed layers of the working class, into second-class citizens. They would be closely surveilled by the secret service as part of a broader increased surveillance of the population.

Macron said that beginning in 2017, “plans to combat radicalisation involving every level of the state were deployed without fanfare in 15 areas, in an extremely confidential manner, to ensure the most efficient operation and cooperation of all government departments, of local judges and intelligence services. Two hundred and twelve bars, 15 prayer locations, four schools, and 13 cultural associations were closed; hundreds of inspections were conducted, and millions of euros were seized. The results obtained lead us to extend this method to the whole country.”

Macron gave himself the task of ensuring the ubiquity of the security agencies. “Our perspective is simple: to ensure a republican presence at the foot of every tower block, and every apartment building,” he said.

This will not only be achieved by spying on the population, but by strict ideological control of all associations seeking state aid, which will have to, according to Macron, “sign a contract respecting republican values.”

Any association not respecting these values, which are to be defined by the Interior ministry, faces potential dissolution. “The motives for dissolution of associations by the government have until now been very limited, limited to terrorism, racism and anti-Semitism. They will be extended to other motives, such as lack of respect for human dignity, or psychological or physical pressure.” The heads of dissolved associations, based on these vague and subjective motives, would have to reimburse all state aid.

Macron announced that Darmanin would introduce the bill on December 9, the 115th anniversary of the 1905 law. It is an attempt to pass off the an extreme-right law as the continuation of the law of 1905. But it is impossible to reconcile this violent attack on French Muslims with the principles of secularism and state neutrality in religious affairs, or with other democratic rights.

The 1905 law was adopted following the Dreyfus Affair and the first crushing defeat inflicted on political anti-Semitism in France. The top brass of the army, the church, and populist parties like Action Française, had supported the false conviction a Jewish officer, captain

Alfred Dreyfus, in 1894, for spying. The socialist workers’ movement, led by Jean Jaurès, played a critical role in establishing his innocence after a long political battle. It represented a direct rejection of attempts by the bourgeoisie to divide workers by inciting national hatreds.

Macron, who hailed the collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain before unleashing riot police on the “yellow vests,” operates on an opposed tradition. His attempts to single out a religious minority, against the backdrop of his deadly back-to-work and school reopening drive during the coronavirus pandemic, is aimed at inciting religious and racial hatred.

Moreover, Macron clearly declared that he had considered the possibility of repudiating the 1905 law, emphasizing that he had considered “a concordat approach” to Islam. He referred to the 1801 concordat between the Holy See in Rome and the French government, abolished by the 1905 law.

The reason that he gave for rejecting this reactionary procedure was that he feared a concordat might feed growing anti-colonial sentiment among French Muslims, while Paris is fighting wars in several of its former Muslim colonies, from Mali to Syria. France, he said, is “a country which has a colonial past and suffered traumas ... with facts which form the foundations of our collective psyche.” Any agreement with external Islamic authorities risked, according to Macron, intensifying what he termed “the post-colonial superego” of Muslims.

These events constitute a warning for the working class in France and internationally: democratic institutions are collapsing in every country. While American President Donald Trump promises to not respect the outcome of the presidential elections next month, the proponents of French nationalism aim to destroy social and democratic rights in France. The force that can defend them is the international working class, mobilized in a revolutionary struggle to take power and construct a socialist society.



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