

Macron promotes anti-Muslim “free speech” hypocrisy after terrorist killing

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Within less than 48 hours of the terrorist attack and murder of a teacher near Paris on Friday afternoon, the entire French political establishment has joined a campaign for “national unity” behind strengthened anti-Muslim laws.

Samuel Paty, a middle-school geography teacher, was murdered just after 5:00 p.m., while leaving his school in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, in the Yvelines region north-west of Paris. The attacker has been identified by police as Abdoullakh Anzonov, an 18-year-old Chechen born in Moscow in 2002, whose family obtained refugee status in France in 2011. Anzonov allegedly travelled 80 kilometers that day by public transport from his home to the school, armed with a 30-cm knife and air rifle, and waited for several hours for Paty outside the school building.

After following him for half a kilometer, Anzonov attacked Paty, stabbing him several times and beheading him on the street. When police arrived, Anzonov reportedly cried “Allahu akbar” as he exchanged fire with them. He was shot and killed on the spot.

The horrific murder of Paty has immediately been exploited by the administration of Emmanuel Macron to intensify its anti-Muslim campaign. The government has declared that the attack demonstrates the necessity for its already-proposed law on Islamic “separatism,” which will be introduced before parliament on December 9, and may now be further strengthened.

It includes a ban on Islamic schools where girls wear the headscarf, but no similar restrictions on Christian educational institutions, and gives the state vast powers to dissolve any association which does not adhere to “Republican values,” as determined by the prime minister.

Anzonov appears to have been motivated by videos

shared on social media, including by the father of one of Paty’s students, accusing the teacher of attacking Islam and offending and discriminating against his Muslim students.

On October 5, Paty had announced to his class that the following day, as part of a class debate on freedom of expression, he would show an image to the class produced by *Charlie Hebdo*. The image, a naked portrait of Mohammed, is typical of the anti-Muslim provocations that the magazine specializes in. Paty signaled to the students that they may find the image offensive, and could either turn around or leave the room if they did not wish to see it.

Speaking on Friday evening, Emmanuel Macron sought to present his government as the moral defender of “Republican” values and free speech threatened by the menace of Islam. “It is not accidental that tonight, a teacher was killed by a terrorist, because he wanted to kill the Republic in its values, its Enlightenment, the possibility to make our children—wherever they come from, that they believe or do not believe, whatever their religion—into free citizens. This is our battle, and it is existential.”

He added that “they will not pass. The obscurantism and violence that accompanies it will not win,” and called on “all compatriots, at this time, to form a block, to be united without any distinction.”

It is difficult to describe the hypocrisy involved in the attempts by Macron to present himself as a bulwark for democratic traditions and free speech. His government is perhaps best known for being condemned by international human rights organizations for its police violence, and for video images of riot officers using tear-gas and shooting rubber bullets at “yellow vest” protesters. It is involved in imperialist wars across the Sahel and the Middle East, deliberately allowing

thousands of refugees attempting to reach Europe by boat to drown in the Mediterranean.

As for “free speech,” the Macron administration has pursued Disclose journalists who revealed illegal French arms sales to support the Saudi Arabian war against the impoverished population of Yemen that has killed tens of thousands of civilians. The “separatism” law is only the latest in a continuing campaign of persecution by successive Socialist Party and Republican governments, which has cultivated a permanent xenophobic anti-Muslim atmosphere in France. This has included the ban on Islamic headscarves in 2004, and the burqa in public places in 2010.

Macron’s comments were immediately used by the extreme-right National Rally and Marine Le Pen to demand harsher measures against immigrants and Muslims. Answering Macron’s comment that “they will not pass,” Le Pen tweeted, “they’re already here.”

The entire political establishment, stretching from Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s *La France Insoumise* to the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR), has joined behind Macron’s hypocritical call for “national unity.”

Yesterday, Prime Minister Jean Castex along with other government ministers joined a rally in Paris attended by several thousand people. Representatives of all the major parties attended, including LFI, the PS and LR. Other rallies from between several hundred and several thousand were held in major cities around the country, where many people attended to show their support for Samuel Paty.

The ruling elite is seeking to use the outrage in the population at the terror attack to build support for Macron’s reactionary program, whipping up an atmosphere of anti-Muslim hysteria.

In an interview with *Le Parisien*, Bernard Cazeneuve, the former PS prime minister of France, blamed the attack on “certain political formations whose elected representatives compromised themselves to win votes in municipal elections,” as well as “Islamism which looks with loving eyes on certain communist organizations that have within them a defiance, not to say a form of hatred, for the republic.”

Manuel Valls, the former interior minister under the PS government of Francois Hollande, shared a tweet from the far-right commentator Céline Pia, who

declared she wouldn’t be attending the Paris protest because the organizers “belong for the most part to the left that has declined into Islamo-Leftism.” Valls said he “shared many of Pia’s views” but would nonetheless attend the rally. He also Tweeted a call for the dissolution of the Collective against Islamophobia in France, a legal organization.

In an interview with BFMTV on Saturday, Jean-Luc Mélenchon connected Friday’s terror attack to a series of gang-related incidents in Dijon in recent months, on the basis that both have involved people from Chechnya. Asked if he would support Macron’s call for a national “bloc,” Mélenchon replied: “Of course...If the head of state calls for national unity, he is making a useful appeal, because the aim of the terrorists is to divide us.”

Mélenchon added that he had decided to support the Macron administration’s anti-Muslim law: “In the next law that will arrive, we will have—since it is now called the law of reinforcement of secularism—to take measures that are efficient to suppress the possibility for these people to group themselves.”

There remain many unanswered questions about how the murder of Paty was able to occur. He had been the target of an active social media campaign for more than one week before the killing. The same student’s father had filed a legal complaint against Paty for sharing of pornographic imagery, and Paty had responded by filing his own charges for defamation.

Abdelhakim Sefrioui, an Islamist who is closely watched by French intelligence, had publicly called for Paty’s resignation and denounced him on several videos. Yet it appears that no measures were taken for the protection of Paty or the school. In successive terrorist attacks in France, it has subsequently emerged that the attackers themselves were either known to or were being watched by French intelligence prior to the attack.



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