

Bowing to right-wing campaign, Canada's Trudeau apologizes to Macron for being "too soft" on Islamist terrorism

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13 November 2020

Bowing to an attack from the right, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called French President Emmanuel Macron last week to offer his apologies for supposedly not being sufficiently supportive of the French government's struggle against Islamist terrorism and its defence of "free speech."

Macron has exploited the two terrorist atrocities that took place in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine and Nice last month to intensify his efforts to scapegoat France's Muslim minority and attack democratic rights. In the process, he and leading figures in his government have advocated positions previously associated with the far-right.

Trudeau was denounced by the French government and media as well as by his political opponents in Canada, especially the federal Conservatives and Quebec nationalists, for not personally condemning the barbaric attacks swiftly and strongly enough. They objected to his claim that he wanted to reach out to "leaders of the Muslim community in Canada" before elaborating on his government's position. Trudeau's response was in line with the multiculturalism policy his Liberal government employs to provide phony "progressive" cover for its ruthless pursuit of Canadian imperialist interests at home and abroad.

While pursuing their rival right-wing agendas, Canada's political elite and corporate media are doing everything possible to obscure the context in which the high school teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded by a young Islamist Chechen immigrant on October 16, after Paty had used sexually-explicit *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in a classroom discussion on free speech.

In the months prior to the attack, the Macron government had whipped up hostility against France's Muslim minority, which is overwhelmingly comprised of poor working-class people, many of them immigrants from North Africa. The adoption of fascist positions within the French ruling elite is so far advanced that Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin recently denounced the display of halal and kosher products in France's supermarkets, echoing the anti-Semitic and Islamophobic rhetoric of Marine Le Pen and the far right.

In the name of the "war on terror" and the defence of state "secularism," Macron has pursued the French ruling class' longstanding chauvinist, anti-democratic campaign against immigrants and Muslims with the aim of promoting reaction, amid an ever-deepening social crisis, and splitting the working class. Less than two weeks before Paty's grotesque murder, Macron unveiled his government's "anti-separatist" law. It will establish state control over the Muslim religion, ban Muslim (but not Roman Catholic) schools, require that all associations pledge to adhere to "Republican values" as defined by the Interior Ministry, and further bolster the surveillance powers of the police and intelligence agencies.

Paty's brutal murder and the knife attack that left three people dead 13

days later at Nice's Notre-Dame basilica have been seized upon by Macron to further this vicious right-wing agenda. He has reiterated his determination to enact the "anti-separatism" law, ordered the expulsion of Muslims labelled as Islamist extremists, and banned social and political groups deemed "hostile to the Republic."

Macron, who has spearheaded the assault on workers' rights in Europe, similarly exploited the 2015 Paris terror attack to make permanent "state of emergency measures" invoked in its aftermath. Showing the true class interests he serves, the former investment banker and "president of the rich" subsequently used these powers to suppress working class opposition, and ordered police to brutally repress the "Yellow Vest" agitation against social inequality. In 2018, he moved to rehabilitate Marshal Philippe Pétain, the head of the Nazi collaborationist Vichy regime.

Macron's anti-Muslim campaign is also bound up with French imperialism's predatory interests. This was underscored by the bitter exchanges it has provoked with Turkey's Islamist president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Behind this diplomatic spat lie deep-going great-power conflicts, which could easily spiral into a direct military confrontation. France and Turkey are on opposite sides in a series of proxy wars and geopolitical conflicts, from Libya to the dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean over gas drilling rights and the smoldering war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus.

While posing as the defenders of "free speech," the chauvinist and far right forces mobilized by Macron are mounting a smear campaign against what they call "Islamism." Like the dishonest campaign against "left-wing anti-Semitism" which seeks to equate opposition to Israel's dispossession of the Palestinian people and Zionism with anti-Semitism, the denunciations of "Islamism" are aimed at branding anyone who defends democratic rights, fights anti-Muslim chauvinism, and opposes French imperialism as complicit in terrorism.

This calumny serves to cover up the fact that the imperialist powers have an entirely duplicitous and mercenary relationship with Islamist terrorism. For decades, the United States, but also France and Canada, have used Islamist terrorist groups as proxies in their predatory wars and intrigues (e.g. Afghanistan, Yugoslavia/Kosovo, Libya, and Syria), while invoking their crimes as justification for invasions and occupations (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria) and sweeping attacks on democratic rights at home. During the 2011 US-led "regime change war" in Libya, Canadian Armed Forces personnel referred to themselves as "al-Qaeda's air force," so closely were their coordinating their bombing missions with the Islamist forces, including al-Qaeda, that the imperialist powers were using, at a cost of tens of thousands of civilian lives, to overthrow the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

Within this context, it becomes clear how cynical and reactionary are

those attacking Trudeau for failing to rally to Macron's side in upholding "free speech," and how fraudulent are the attempts of the Liberal government to provide a "progressive" cover for Canada's imperialist foreign policy with rhetoric about human rights, feminism, and "multiculturalism."

Trudeau did not personally condemn Paty's murder until days after the event, and only when questioned by the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons. He called the act "unacceptable," but said he would speak to "world leaders and leaders of the Muslim community in Canada" to find out their point of view. Three days later, Trudeau declared that freedom of speech "is not without limits." He then compared Paty's classroom presentation of the mocking caricatures of Mohammed, from which he had allowed students to absent themselves, to "shouting fire in a crowded movie theater."

The French government reacted to Trudeau's remarks with hostility. A source close to Macron told *Le Monde*, "The executive deplores the weakness of the Canadian Prime Minister's support." The Conservatives and the BQ, meanwhile joined forces to attack Trudeau from the right, lauding Macron and denouncing Trudeau's "multiculturalism" from a nationalist-chauvinist perspective. Demagogically, Bloc leader Yves-François Blanchet stated that for Trudeau, "religious dogma and the violence it provokes in extreme cases take precedence over freedom of expression." Blanchet then demanded Trudeau "apologize" to the French president.

Quebec Premier François Legault, and all the parties in the Quebec National Assembly, including the purportedly "left," pro-independence party, Québec Solidaire, rallied behind Macron, with Legault declaring on Nov. 2, "I totally disagree with Mr. Trudeau. Freedom of expression must be protected." Needless to say, none of the provincial legislators deemed it politic to remind the premier that he and his right-wing populist Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government passed legislation in 2019 that savagely attacks the freedom of expression of religious minorities, including by imposing a blanket ban on Muslim women who wear the *niqab* or *burqa* receiving essential public services like health care and education.

The next day, in what was clearly meant as a rebuke of Ottawa, Macron called Legault to thank him for his support. Rattled by Macron's action, Trudeau phoned the French president two days later to apologize. According to the account provided by the Prime Minister's Office, Trudeau and Macron "agreed on the importance of defending freedom of expression ... and on their shared commitment to fighting terrorism and violent extremism." Significantly, the press release added, that they had also used the call to reaffirm their shared commitment to NATO and Canada's support for Paris in a series of French imperialist interventions across Africa and the Middle East. Trudeau has previously touted his political affinity with Macron, and the two have been close allies in championing multilateral institutions and joint imperialist action in opposition to US President Donald Trump's "America First" agenda.

Although Trudeau's change of attitude represents an adaptation to the chauvinistic right, his initial position was by no means progressive. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has demonstrated in its coverage of recent French events, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to denounce and expose the reactionary character of the Islamist terrorist attacks without giving any quarter to the anti-democratic, chauvinist agenda and predatory interests of French imperialism. But this is unthinkable for Trudeau, a pro-war, pro-austerity capitalist politician whose loyalty first and foremost is to advancing the imperialist interests of corporate Canada at home and abroad.

Trudeau and his Liberals are strong advocates of Canada's official "multiculturalism" policy. In the name of openness and diversity, this policy promotes identity politics and the division of the population into discrete ethnic and religious groups. It is aimed at re-enforcing Canadian

nationalism and dividing the working class.

This supposedly "progressive" ideology has also served time and again to justify Canadian imperialist violence. While claiming to be pursuing a "feminist foreign policy" and fighting for "human rights" around the world, the Trudeau government is increasing military spending by over 70 percent, and has expanded Canada's involvement in US military-strategic offensives around the world, including in the Middle East, and against Russia and China.

It is not surprising that Quebec nationalists, whether of the pro-independence or the "autonomist" (Quebec First) CAQ variety, played a prominent role in the recent right-wing agitation against Trudeau, laced as it was with anti-Muslim chauvinism. For years, the Parti Québécois and the BQ, its sister party at the federal level, have agitated against Muslims and immigrants, presenting them as a potential threat to Quebec society, with the aim of diverting attention away from their pro-corporate, right-wing agenda. They are also staunchly pro-imperialist. Whenever Ottawa has deployed the Canadian Armed Forces in support of Washington's wars, the *indépendantiste* BQ has lent its support.

Like the Conservatives, the traditional party of Anglo-chauvinism, the Quebec nationalist's "defense" of freedom of expression is entirely selective. The current CAQ-dominated Quebec legislature has passed a series of discriminatory laws similar to those championed by Macron and his predecessors. Bill 21 prohibits people in "positions of authority," including teachers, from wearing "ostentatious" religious symbols such as the hijab, Jewish kippah, or Sikh turban, while Bill 9 introduces "cultural criteria" in the selection of immigrants.

The record of Trudeau and his supporters in defending "freedom of speech" is no better. The Trudeau government is a prominent supporter of the international campaign to increase state control over social media—a campaign, mounted in the name of opposing "fake news" and "hate speech," but that has resulted in measures that are increasingly being used to censor left-wing and socialist views.

In their attack on Trudeau over the French events, his right-wing opponents tried to make an amalgam with his recent failure to defend a University of Ottawa professor who faced sanctions and was threatened with the loss of her job, after some students, motivated by reactionary middle-class identity politics, complained about her use of the N-word as part of a classroom explanation.

In fact, the two events are radically different. Macron is using "free speech" to provide a pseudo-democratic fig-leaf for attacking France's Muslim minority and with the aim of stoking chauvinism and pressing forward with class war. The professor used the derogatory term in an academic setting as an example of how groups targeted for discrimination sometimes appropriate the slurs used against them.

Despite their tactical differences, all sections of the ruling class, from Trudeau's Liberals to the Conservatives and Quebec sovereignists, are united against the working class. None of them have raised any objection to Macron's use of state repression against the Yellow Vests and other working-class opponents. Nor have any of them spoken in defence of the right to freedom of speech of WikiLeaks journalist Julian Assange, who has been persecuted and imprisoned for years for releasing documents exposing the war-crimes of US imperialism.

Workers must adopt a socialist and internationalist perspective in opposition to the racism and chauvinism of the right and far-right and the no less anti-working class identity politics propagated by Trudeau et al.—whose logic is to pit working people against each other in a tribal struggle for the "equitable" division of the misery of capitalism along racial, ethnic, gender and religious lines. Only the international unity of the working class on the basis of a socialist program, i.e. the reorganization of society so as place human needs before profit, can put an end to attacks on democratic rights, the growing threat posed by fascism, imperialist aggression and war, and realize genuine social equality for all.



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