Macron government advisor meets with neofascist Marion Marechal Le Pen

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The French daily *Le Monde* revealed on December 27 that Bruno Roger-Petit, an advisor to President Emmanuel Macron, met for lunch with Marion Maréchal, the extreme-right niece of Marine Le Pen, on October 14. The meeting had been kept secret until now but has since been confirmed by all parties.

In 2017 Marion Maréchal left the National Rally (*Rassemblement National* —RN), which is led by Marine Le Pen, after the end of her term as a deputy. Some RN activists consider her to be the true heir to Jean-Marie Le Pen, and she is known for her extremist ideas, including her adherence to the fascist theory of the "great replacement." The theory was developed by the right-wing French intellectual Renaud Camus and was used as the title for the manifesto of Brenton Tarrant, who slaughtered 50 Muslim worshippers at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019. Marechal Le Pen also calls for political unity of the right-wing around far-right demands.

Members of Macron's presidential majority and the opposition parties hypocritically declared their indignation about the meeting. In fact, the encounter is part of a broader turn to the far right by Macron's government, particularly since the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic.

Roger-Petit is a journalist close to the Socialist Party who backed Macron during his election campaign. He served as spokesman for the president until September 2018, when the communication services of the Elysée Palace were reorganized in the wake of the scandal of the Benalla affair, when one of Macron's bodyguards was caught on camera beating protesters. Roger-Petit's defense of Macron was deemed particularly clumsy. The position of spokesperson was abolished, and Roger-Petit was reappointed as "memory advisor."

The content of the meeting is unknown. Marechal Le Pen indicated to *Le Monde* that she did not fully understand why Macron's advisor wanted to meet with her. Roger-Petit said: "I wanted to know what she had to say and whether she was in resonance with the state of popular opinion—which is not the case. I had to find out that we disagreed. This is a bit like what Xavier Bertrand did when he met Eric Zemmour."

Roger-Petit trivializes his meeting by evoking the case of Xavier Bertrand. The latter is currently seeking to impose himself as a right-wing candidate for the next presidential election, and he met the extreme right-wing journalist and essayist, Eric Zemmour, known for his anti-Muslim diatribes and his attempt to rehabilitate Pétain. This meeting is linked to the turn toward the extreme right by the Republican party, which Bertrand is courting and whose program is becoming less and less distinguishable from that of the RN.

This does not change the nature of the political trajectory of Macron's presidency. The lunch with Marechal is only one element of many relationships that Macron has woven with the extreme right over the years.

Macron and his government are pursuing a violent ruling class policy and destroying the social gains of the working class. In this conflict, against a backdrop of explosive social anger against unemployment, austerity, and the rising economic inequality being exacerbated by the pandemic, the political representatives of the capitalist elite are throwing overboard all the democratic pretensions they claimed to cherish.

In 2018, Macron paid tribute to Pétain as a great soldier and attempted to have celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the birth of Charles Mauras, the founder of the anti-Semitic, anti-Dreyfusard and anti-democratic Action française party. In April 2018, Macron also declared before the entire Catholic

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hierarchy gathered at Les Bernardins, among a flood of praise, that "I am convinced that the Catholic essence must contribute now and always to the life of our nation."

Now he is carrying out a series of attacks on democratic rights directed against the entire working class, while agitating against the Muslim minority of the population. He has sought to justify an attack on the 1901 law on the freedom of association and the 1905 law on the separation of church and state, both of which are the subject of his anti-separatism legislation, by adopting theories previously confined to the far right. According to these arguments, France is threatened with the communalist withdrawal of the Muslim population toward radical Islamism, targeting nothing less than the overthrow of the institutions of the Republic.

This theory of "Islamist separatism" has been almost unanimously adopted by the French political establishment to justify sweeping inroads into democratic rights.

According to *Le Canard Enchaîné*, the meeting with Marechal took place thanks to the mediation of Geoffroy Lejeune, editorial director of the extreme right-wing magazine *Valeurs actuelles*. Roger-Petit's close and ongoing contacts with Lejeune are well known. Macron himself was close to Yves de Kerdrel when the latter was managing director of the Valmonde group and editorial director of *Valeurs actuelles*, while Macron was deputy general secretary of the Elysée Palace and then Minister of the Economy under the former Socialist Party government.

These longstanding contacts culminated in a long interview by Macron with *Valeurs A ctuelles* at the end of October 2019, when Macron more openly than previously supported outright anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim arguments. It was the first time a sitting French president had given an interview to an extreme right-wing media outlet since the fall of the Vichy regime. Referring to Muslims, he declared: "I am fighting with all my strength against communalism," which he condemned as "secession."

Some of Macron's contacts are aimed at evaluating possible rivals to Marine Le Pen's candidacy and weakening it in the next presidential election. The possible candidacy of General Pierre de Villiers, the former chief of staff of the armed forces, has been floated throughout the media.

This only underlines the fact that in its struggles against the European Union's policy of "herd immunity" and austerity, the working class will find no progressive or democratic section of the capitalist class. There is nothing to negotiate with Macron and his allies, nor with the various fractions of the extreme right. The fight against the pandemic and the accelerating growth of inequality depends on the building of a socialist movement in the international working class fighting for political power.

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