

Macron dictates “Charter of principles” to the French Islamic Council

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Last month, the French Council of Islam (*Conseil français du culte musulman* —CFCM) adopted the “Charter of Principles” of Islam imposed by the French government. The charter commits Muslim religious officials to respect the principles dictated by the French government, which since the end of 2019 has presented Muslims as being driven by “separatism.”

While hypocritically claiming to defend religious rights, the government’s measure aims to transform Muslims into de facto second-class citizens. Though the legal position of religions is supposed to be governed by the 1905 secularism law, the Macron government has sought to impose on Muslims a humiliating pledge of loyalty to the state. Nothing comparable is being asked of other religions.

Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin revealed the content of the anti-Muslim campaign with his declaration to *Le Figaro* last December that, “up until now, the government has been interested in radicalization and terrorism. Now, we will also attack the terrain of terrorism, where can be found those people who create the intellectual and cultural space to secede and impose their values.”

Thus, the police will target people who have not been guilty of any criminal act. They will be able to target thoughts and statements on the basis of their claims that they supposedly might encourage “separatism.” The so-called “breeding ground” is so vaguely defined that it includes places of worship, Muslim religious and cultural associations, and their defenders. To be a “separatist” in the end means to have thoughts or habits that the police disapprove of.

By instituting thought-crime as a pseudo-legal category and a presumption of guilt aimed primarily at Muslims, the state is threatening the democratic rights of the entire population. In this situation, the defence of Muslims is an essential task of the working class. Opposing attempts to divide the workers along religious and ethnic lines is essential for the working class to unite in struggle.

What does the “Charter of Principles” dictate?

The charter is pervaded by a grotesque fraud, which presents the capitalist state as a defender of the principle of equality against Muslims, even as it attempts to take away their freedom of expression. The police dictate the opinions of Muslims and forbid them to express themselves politically.

The Charter states: “From a religious and ethical point of view, Muslims, whether nationals or foreign residents, are bound to France by a pact. This compels them to respect national cohesion, public order and the laws of the Republic.” This duty to the state outweighs their own beliefs: “No religious conviction can be invoked to evade the obligations of citizens.”

What does it mean for Macron to demand that Muslims respect “national cohesion?” In France as throughout Europe, the government is imposing austerity that is exacerbating social inequality, and a policy of herd immunity against the coronavirus that has been denounced by scientists. More than 600,000 people have already died across the

continent as a result. The “yellow vest” movement and numerous strikes throughout France and Europe have testified to the explosive anger in the working class provoked by these policies.

Since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which removed the major obstacle to the use of military force by the NATO powers, France has regularly invaded Muslim-majority countries among its former colonies. The wars in Côte d’Ivoire, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Mali have provoked opposition and mistrust among workers. This is particularly the case among Muslim workers.

The “Charter of Principles” prohibits them from any political discussion in places of worship, stating: “We refuse to allow places of worship to be used to disseminate political discourse or to import conflicts occurring elsewhere in the world. Our mosques and places of worship are reserved for prayer and the transmission of values. They are not erected for the dissemination of nationalist speeches defending foreign regimes and supporting foreign policies hostile to France, our country, and our French compatriots.”

The new law does not cover terrorist acts, which were already punishable by law before Macron dictated the charter. It prohibits political discussions that would be critical of the foreign or domestic policies of the French state.

The continuous government inroads into the private lives of Muslims, including the ban on veil or facial coverings in schools and all public places since 2004 and 2010, has created a hysterical Islamophobic atmosphere. Reactionary incidents, such as the expulsion of Muslim high school girls for wearing overly long skirts, and the beating of husbands of veiled women by police, have contributed to a sense among Muslim workers that state-sanctioned racism is aimed at them.

The “Charter of Principles” therefore prohibits any mention of state racism. Islamophobic acts, it asserts, “are the work of an extremist minority that should not be confused with either the state or the French people. Consequently, denunciations of alleged State racism, like all posturing about victimhood, are defamation.”

The “Charter” adds that Islamic officials are to remind followers “that certain allegedly Muslim cultural practices do not fall under Islam.” This vague and incoherent statement requires the CFCM to defend government policies, such as the law banning headscarves in schools.

This reveals the reactionary and discriminatory content of the “charter.” The French state is creating for Muslims a status as a special minority for whom any collective criticism of the state is prohibited. Indeed, treating Muslims’ reference to state racism as “defamation” is tantamount to criminalizing the discussion of French political and religious life that is informed by French and European history.

French imperialism has a long and bloody tradition of more-or-less overt state racism. Between the conquest of Algeria in the 1830s and the end of World War II, it imposed a discriminatory Indigenous Code on Muslims in the colonies. The abolition of this Code in 1946 came only after a workers’ uprising against the Vichy collaborationist regime, which had

pursued a policy of deporting Jews to death camps in Europe.

In the present context, these facts are not merely academic historical references. Neo-fascist partisans of “French Algeria,” who are also apologists for Nazi collaborationism, play a major role in contemporary politics. Their defenders, like far-right pundit Eric Zemmour, who was convicted of inciting racial hatred, have extensive connections in the media and business.

The attempt to cast a pall of silence on the history of the 20th century takes place in a definite international context. The pandemic has not only triggered the most severe economic crisis since the 1930s. It has discredited the ruling class. The financial aristocracy, exposed by its policy of “herd immunity,” and terrified of working-class opposition, is turning toward far-right dictatorship.

Trump’s attempted coup, led by neo-Nazi forces in Washington on January 6, revealed the fascist rot eating away at the heart of world imperialism. The aftershocks of this political earthquake are only beginning to spread across Europe, where, long before Trump’s coup attempt, neo-fascist parties were already being encouraged by broad sections of the ruling elite.

It is impossible to evaluate the Muslim charter outside this international context. In Germany, the extreme right is again in parliament, and far-right professors protected by the ruling Grand Coalition declare that Hitler was “not vicious.” In Spain, officers who boast they are fascists have reacted to strikes by Spanish workers by declaring that “26 million” people should be shot.

Fascistic policies under the guise of defending the Republic

The peculiarity of the fascistic attack on democratic rights in France is that it is carried out in the name of the defence of the Republic.

The “Charter of Principles” was adopted in the context of the bill against Islamist “separatism,” renamed the “Bill Confirming Respect for the Principles of the Republic.” The law has been discussed in committee in the National Assembly since Monday, January 18. Since the end of last year, the entire political establishment has been united behind the slogan for a struggle against “Islamist separatism.”

It united in a multiparty senatorial commission of inquiry, led by the right-wing Republicans (LR), entitled: “Islamist Radicalization: Facing and Fighting Together.” The commission was composed of representatives of all political groups in the Senate, including the Stalinist French Communist Party.

The pandemic and the political crisis linked to the reopening campaign accelerated this offensive. Dozens of mosques and Muslim educational institutions were closed and the humanitarian association Barakacity and the Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France (CCIF), a human rights association, were dissolved. These established associations operated within a completely legal framework.

Under the cover of protecting the Republic, Macron is seeking to overturn the 1905 secularism law. The law was passed under the influence of the socialist movement following the Dreyfus Affair—the defeat of the anti-Semitic forces in the Army and the Church that sought to frame and imprison the Jewish captain Alfred Dreyfus. By targeting the 1905 law, Macron is threatening the legal framework of freedom of expression and the relations between the church and state that have held in France for more than a century, outside of the period of the occupation during World War II.

Macron compelled the CFCM to draft major documents within a few weeks, with content largely dictated by the authorities. He wants a binding and accelerated timetable to create the National Council of Imams, which is to “certify” officials who will be compelled to commit to the charter.

To find a point of comparison, several media pundits referred to the beginning of the 19th century, and the creation by Napoleon I of an official representation of French Judaism, after the French Revolution of 1789.

Under the Empire, from 1806 to 1808, Napoleon reorganized Judaism in the wake of the Emancipation Act of September 27, 1791 in the Constituent Assembly, which granted Jews access to French citizenship. Napoleon I’s reforms led to the creation of the Central Jewish Consistory of France to organize and legalize Jewish worship.

In reality, there can be no comparison between Napoleon’s work and that of Macron. Despite his authoritarianism and his prejudices against the Jews, Napoleon allowed the organization of the religion and the integration of the Jewish populations. In this, he pursued the trajectory, spurred on by the Revolution, of destroying the vestiges of feudalism.

In contrast, one cannot but recognize the malicious intent of the measures prepared by Macron, aimed at legitimizing the persecution of Muslims.

The precedents of Macron’s action are not in the 1789 French Revolution, but its opponents. Before welcoming the neo-fascist vote on the night of his election, Macron had already criticized the execution of Louis XVI in 1793 and declared that France lacked a king. His government tried to have the works of the leader of the *Action Française*, the anti-Semitic monarchist and Nazi collaborationist Charles Maurras, re-released, and he called Pétain a “great soldier” as he unleashed riot police on the “yellow vests.”

It is no coincidence that in 2019 the government supported the media campaign against *J’Accuse*, Roman Polanski’s film about the Dreyfus Affair. The film opposes the influence of the anti-Dreyfusards, of Maurrasian racism, and of Maurras himself, who called the French defeat, Pétain’s coming to power, and the Nazi collaboration in 1940 “divine surprise.”

The anti-Muslim campaign of the French state goes hand in hand with the policy of “herd immunity,” imperialist war, and a violent assault on the working class and its social rights, including to strike and protest.

The “anti-separatist” law is being accompanied by the “global security law,” which would prohibit publication of videos of the police. As revealed by the beating by the police in Paris of a music producer, Georges Zecler, in his studio, this would allow the police to attack anyone and claim that they were acting in self-defence. The United Nations has warned that the law contravenes human rights. It aims to consolidate a fascistic police state against the working class.

A political struggle is required for the working class. The history of the 20th century and the fascist genocide of the Jews in Europe are a permanent warning of the horrible price the working class pays if it allows forces of the extreme right to incite racial and religious hatreds and divisions. It is necessary to unify the working class internationally, independently of the trade union apparatuses, in a struggle against the policy of “herd immunity” and the fascist drift of the ruling class, and for the transfer of power to the working class on a socialist perspective.



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