

French Communist Party and Unsubmissive France back Macron government's far-right "anti-separatist" law

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The Macron government's "bill strengthening respect of republican principles" has been under debate before the National Assembly since February 1. The law drastically restricts the freedom of association and religious freedoms under the pretext of fighting against Islamic separatism. The debate on the law is taking place in an increasingly fascistic atmosphere. Under these conditions, the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France (LFI) have given their support to Macron's extreme-right law.

On Thursday, February 4, the Assembly voted on Article 4 of the bill, which creates the offence of "separatism." The article criminalizes the use of threats, violence or "intimidation" aimed at obtaining "total or partial exemption from, or different application of" the rules governing a public service. Those convicted face five years' imprisonment and a €75,000 fine. This sweeping definition will provide vast powers to state and police forces.

The bill was brought forward following the terrorist killing of high school teacher Samuel Paty on October 16. Paty had shown his class an offensive cartoon of Mohamed. The offence in the new law has been so vaguely defined that it could be applied even to pupils who insist on not eating pork at school. It paves the way for an intensified anti-Muslim atmosphere by the French ruling class. It is a profound attack on the principle of secularism.

Article 4 was adopted without a single vote against. The PCF parliamentary group voted for the article, and the LFI parliamentary group abstained. These parties are thus complicit in the increasingly fascistic legislative agenda unveiled by the Macron government

since the beginning of the pandemic.

On January 5, the Assembly voted on Article 6, which creates a "contract of republican commitment" in the 1901 law on public associations. This is a flagship measure of Macron's bill. In the grotesque words of Marlène Schiappa, Macron's minister delegate in charge of citizenship, the contract will guarantee that there is "not one euro of public money for the enemies of the Republic. Subsidies, therefore French money, must not finance organisations that are the breeding ground for terrorism."

These statements are not based on any tangible facts. Associations are already obliged to respect French law. The aim of this article of the law is to introduce major restrictions on the payment of subsidies to associations, adding criteria unrelated to the activities of the association.

The law will directly target the religious and political opinions of the leaders and members of associations, in order to withhold financial subsidies. The "republican commitment" is to be set out by government decree and can be tightened with each new wave of police-state laws. Associations that receive government subsidies will be forced to adhere to and collaborate with the government's security agenda.

However, provisions governing associations already exist. The Charter of Reciprocal Commitments between the state and associations was drawn up in 2001 on the centenary of the 1901 law, and then expanded in 2014 to include local authorities. It defines a general framework that must be respected by associations in order to receive subsidies. Since then, the link between Islamic "separatism" and the freedom of association has been concocted by the Macron government to

justify its repressive law.

The report on the presentation of the law transmitted to the State Council states: “The activities of associations, because of the wide freedoms they enjoy, are used very actively by separatist actors, especially in the social, cultural and extracurricular areas.” The government clearly plans to deprive a large number of associations of funding. Moreover, it is not only aimed at supposed Muslim “radicalism”; the repressive measures will affect all kinds of associations.

Other provisions of the law contain even more far-reaching attacks. Article 8 considerably extends the grounds for dissolution of an association. Most significantly, it allows an association to be held responsible for the actions of any of its members. The article was discussed and adopted on February 8. It is a measure worthy of a fascist regime, which will allow mass dissolution of associations, including political parties and organisations formed under the 1901 law.

In this increasingly fascistic context, the establishment parties are seeking to outdo one another. The atmosphere has enabled the far-right National Rally of Marine Le Pen to table a counter-bill that goes even further.

The statements by the members of the Republican party (LR) often go even further than Le Pen’s party. Eric Ciotti, one of the Republicans speakers on the bill, said during the debates, “[T]he [Muslim] veil is not a harmless garment, it is the banner of Islamism and its ideology.”

As in any authoritarian regime, Macron is establishing close police control at every stage of the activities of associations and their formation. The abolition of such controls at the beginning of the 20th century, in favour of the freedom to create and manage associations, was a democratic conquest, as was the 1905 secularism law. These advances were the result of the struggle of the working class and the activities of its socialist representatives, who fought against the anti-Semitic and capitalist forces of reaction in the Dreyfus Affair.

The increasing turn toward fascism stems from the deep global crisis of capitalism. Death on a mass scale has become the new normal by the coronavirus pandemic and the policy of “herd immunity” pursued by governments in France and internationally. Enormous levels of social inequality, the increasingly

parasitic character of the global financial system, the endless waging of neo-colonial wars over decades and the preparations for “great-power conflicts” are incompatible with democratic forms of rule. The ruling class around the world is turning to dictatorial forms of rule and promoting neo-fascist ideologies.

Macron intends to build the police state required to pursue his policy of enriching the financial oligarchy, which will require the crushing of popular opposition. The accumulation of police-state laws has become his priority for the end of his five-year term in 2022.

In this context, the major political parties, including LFI and the PCF, have made a political pact with the Macron government behind the scenes. The straw man of Islamic separatism is being held up to justify a front with outright neo-fascist forces under the banner of “republicanism,” as the means for strengthening the far-right.

This propaganda campaign has been meticulously prepared in the ruling class, in league with anti-Islamic intellectual circles. By claiming to defend the Republic, it is aimed at legitimizing continuous attacks on democratic rights. The defence of democratic rights cannot be carried out through appeals to the ruling elite, but only through the independent mobilisation of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for a relentless struggle against the shameless lies of the ruling class and media about Islamic “separatism” and for a reminder of the historical and contemporary issues at stake in the defence of the democratic rights contained in the 1901 and 1905 laws. We call on the working class to demand the full and immediate withdrawal of the law as part of its ongoing and future political and social struggles.



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