

Adopting “anti-separatist” law, Macron moves to censor French universities

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On February 16, the National Assembly approved President Emmanuel Macron’s “anti-separatist” law, also known as the law “to strengthen respect for the principles of the Republic.” By imposing strict state control of the Muslim faith and a principle of collective responsibility on associations and political parties in order to facilitate their rapid banning by the police, the law aims to effect a drastic and reactionary transformation of social and political life.

Macron’s La République en Marche party and the Democratic Movement (MoDem) voted in favor of the law. Unsubmissive France’s 17 deputies voted unanimously against the law, though they had voted for many of its articles in parliamentary commissions; so did Les Républicains (The Republicans). Most French Communist Party and Socialist Party deputies abstained, as did neo-fascist deputy Marine Le Pen. By a vote of 347 to 151, with 65 abstentions, the Assembly approved the law, which will now go to the Senate for approval in March.

The fundamentally undemocratic and fascistic nature of this law emerges in the remarks made the same day by Minister of Higher Education Frédérique Vidal. The “anti-separatist” law goes hand in hand with a frontal assault on academic freedom and freedom of conscience.

Vidal confirmed that the government will ask the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) to investigate all ongoing university research in France to assess its ideological acceptability: “Yes, I will indeed ask for an assessment of all the research taking place in our country, whether it is research on post-colonialism for example.” She called for measures to combat “the radicalization of opinions and statements.”

Vidal was developing comments she had made Sunday on CNews, where she announced that she

would ask the CNRS to investigate and root out “Islamism” in “all currents of research” in France. She called for “a distinction to be made between what is academic research and what is political militancy and opinion.”

The Conference of University Presidents (CPU) reacted by publishing a communiqué to denounce Vidal’s statement. It states: “The CPU expresses its astonishment at the new sterile polemic on the subject of ‘Islamism’ in the university. ‘Islamism’ is not a concept. It is a pseudo-notion for which one would seek in vain even the beginning of a scientific definition, and which it would be appropriate to leave, if not to the animators of CNews, more broadly, to the far right that has popularized it.”

The CPU also criticized “the misuse of the CNRS, whose mission is in no way to produce evaluations of the work of teacher-researchers, or to clarify what is ‘political militancy or opinion’.” The CPU demands at the very least urgent clarifications, both of what are the ideological bases of such a request, and as to the form of the request, which sets up the CNRS in opposition to the universities.”

Nevertheless, the government and the CNRS are moving quickly to implement the ideological evaluation of university research by the state. CNRS representatives told *Le Monde* that the CNRS is “discussing with the cabinet to clarify the minister’s expectations.” *Le Monde* added that the ministry had confirmed, “without providing further details,” that “the objectives will be defined in the coming days.”

Law professor Noé Wagener stated: “Deputies of the president’s party, in addition to those of The Republicans party, now firmly believe that higher education has become a hotbed of ‘separatism.’ ... The idea that there is academic work that is ‘bad’, because

it is dangerous for social life, has become entrenched in their minds and may lead to legislative initiatives that restrict academic freedom.”

Terrified by rising social anger against austerity and capitalism, and against “herd immunity” policies on the pandemic, Macron is trying to brand opposition as thought crime. If it uses the terms used by neo-fascist polemicists such as Michel Onfray or Eric Zemmour to evaluate academic research, it is because it is aiming at the same targets as them: opposition to the wars waged by Paris in the Islamic world, as well as to militarism and the police state. Its target is not only researchers, but the entire working class.

The government says nothing about the sanctions it wants to impose on academics its inquiry finds guilty of “Islamism.” But such an evaluation would inevitably have the character of a witch hunt: academics denounced by the government would be equated with criminals complicit in terrorism and therefore enemies of the people, though it is self-evident that they have carried out no terrorist acts.

The official presentation of the “anti-separatist” law as a defence of republican principles is a fraud. Drafted under the authority of Interior Minister Gérard Darmanin, a former sympathizer of the far-right monarchist Action Française party, it undermines the 1905 law on secularism and separation of religious and state affairs, by subjecting the Muslim faith to strict state control. Associations that the law threatens with potential dissolution, including political parties, are also effectively under orders to conform to the “anti-separatist” diktat.

This is not a defence of the international principles of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” laid out for people of all races and origins by the French Revolution of 1789. This law was inspired by forces that are in fact conscious enemies of the democratic principles established during the American and French revolutions in the 18th century: they aim to impose anti-social and murderous policies in the interest of the financial aristocracy, despite rising working class opposition.

As is often the case in France, this reactionary measure was inspired by intellectuals linked to power and trained by petty-bourgeois, anti-Trotskyist organizations.

Vidal’s proposed measure echoes a call to the

government to censor universities, the so-called “Manifesto of the 100,” made in November 2020 by a group of right-wing intellectuals including Marcel Gauchet, Pierre-André Taguieff, and former Education Minister Luc Ferry. Gauchet was a student of Claude Lefort, the co-founder of the group Socialisme ou Barbarie, which broke with the Fourth International and with Marxism in 1949. Today, they relentlessly elevate racial and ethnic criteria in order to promote right-wing, nationalist opposition to Marxist class politics.

Their manifesto appeals to anti-Americanism, French nationalism, colonialist hatreds and barely disguised white nationalism to justify university censorship. They write: “Nativist, racist and ‘decolonial’ ideologies (transferred from North American campuses) are alive and well, feeding a hatred of ‘Whites’ and France; and sometimes violent political militancy attacks those who still dare to oppose anti-Western dogmatism and the multiculturalist orthodoxy.”

They continued, “As the wearing of the Muslim veil—among other symptoms—has spread in recent years, it is time to give things their right names and also to become aware of the responsibility, in the current situation, of ideologies that have originated and spread throughout the university and beyond. The importation of Anglo-Saxon ideologies, intellectual conformism, fear and political correctness are a real threat to our universities. ... We therefore ask the Minister to put in place measures to detect Islamist aberrations.”

If the adoption of such measures by the government shows above all its weakness and panic in the face of rising working class anger, it would be a fatal error to minimize the dangers of dictatorship posed by the “anti-separatist” law and the censorship proposed by Vidal, Gauchet and others. It is essential to politically mobilize the workers and youth against this attempt to stifle freedom of opinion and democratic principles, by waging a socialist struggle against the financial aristocracy and all its political servants.



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