

French government campaigns against the construction of a mosque in Alsace

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As the Macron government is enacting a series of anti-democratic laws and promoting anti-Muslim hysteria, French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin has launched a new campaign against the construction of a mosque in Strasbourg, in the Alsace-Lorraine region.

On March 22, the Strasbourg city council, led by Green mayor Jeanne Barseghian, voted to approve a 2.5-million-euro subsidy for the construction of the Eyyub Sultan mosque.

The following day, Darmanin published a provocative tweet denouncing “an organization that refused to sign the Charter of Principles of Islam in France and that defends a political Islam.” He said on BFMTV: “I had the opportunity to tell the mayor of Strasbourg ... that we did not find this friendly to French interests, to say the least.”

The Macron government’s intervention is part of a wider attack on Muslims, which is designed to promote an extreme-right movement and justify attacks on the working class’s democratic rights. The French state is currently seeking to pass the “anti-separatist” law, which gives the government enormous control over associations and religions, under the pretext of defending secularism.

The plans to construct what would be the largest mosque in Europe in Strasbourg were initiated in the 1990s. More recently, the Green-majority mayor’s office granted 2.5 million euros for the construction of the mosque, the total cost of which is estimated at 31 million. Since 2008, the city has already spent 22 million euros on financing religious buildings for different religions. The spending allocated toward the Muslim construction is less than for the other religions.

In Alsace-Moselle, the public authorities can legally provide public subsidies up to 10 per cent of the total cost of construction of religious buildings. This is

prohibited elsewhere in France by the 1905 law, but it is not applied in Alsace, which was part of Germany when France adopted the 1905 law.

According to Darmanin, the Islamic Confederation of Milli Görüs (CIMG), which is behind the construction project, “has refused to sign the charter of principles of Islam in France and ... defends a political Islam.”

The “Charter of Principles” of Islam in France is a document drafted by the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), but whose content was imposed by Macron and Darmanin, in clear violation of the separation of church and state. The CFCM leadership did not even consult French imams and practising Muslims and hastily prepared the document. This has provoked a crisis in the CFCM, which is likely to break apart, as several constituents have refused to sign the charter.

For the Macron government, the “charter” is a cynical attempt to present itself as a defender of the principle of equality for Muslims, while reducing their rights. It allows the police to impose an opinion on Muslims and take away their freedom of political expression. It states: “From a religious and ethical point of view, Muslims ... are bound to France by a pact. This pact commits them to respect national cohesion, public order and the laws of the Republic.”

According to the Charter, Muslims’ duties towards the State take precedence over their conscience: “No religious conviction may be invoked to evade the obligations of citizens.”

The “Charter of Principles” prohibits political discussion in places of worship: “We do not allow places of worship to be used to spread political discourse or to import conflicts that are taking place in other parts of the world. Our mosques and places of worship are reserved for prayer and the transmission of

values...” This is aimed at critics of imperialism’s neo-colonial wars as well as police repression inside France, as terrorist actions are already proscribed by existing laws.

The Macron government is seeking to whip up a xenophobic atmosphere. Referring to the construction of the mosque, Darmanin declared his opposition “particularly in Strasbourg ... to extremely strong attempts to interfere in our country, notably by Turkey We have a number of indications that the Turkish government wants to interfere in French affairs, especially religious ones.”

Yet it is the French government that is responsible for “interference” abroad. Since 2011, when Sarkozy launched a war in Libya with NATO to overthrow the government of Moammar Gaddafi, successive French presidents have supported Islamist militias to take over the country, leading to the complete societal breakdown of Libya.

In Syria, France and the United States followed the same procedure, supporting Islamist militias to try to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad. This war triggered a humanitarian catastrophe across the region, killing almost half a million people and forcing over 10 million to flee their homes.

Darmanin’s intervention in Alsace is part of a campaign by the Macron government against Muslim rights. Ahead of the 2022 presidential election, the Macron government is attempting to position itself to the right of Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally.

In February, Darmanin took part in a debate with Le Pen, during which he criticised the latter for “not voting for laws,” such as the 2017 anti-terrorism law, which allowed the closure of places of worship. Attacking Le Pen from the right, Darmanin said that Le Pen, “as she attempts to de-demonize her party, has come to act with softness. You should take vitamins, I find that you are not tough enough!”

On 20 October 2020, Darmanin denounced the presence in supermarkets of kosher and halal sections. “I have always been shocked to walk into a supermarket and see an aisle with the cuisine from some community and some other on the other side,” he said, referring to halal, kosher and other foods that satisfy religious requirements. “That is how communalism begins.”

This thinly disguised appeal to anti-Semitic and anti-

Muslim sentiments suggests that separated supermarket shelves can contribute to the threat of terrorist attacks.

Darmanin himself has been close to the far-right royalist party *L’action française* (AF). In 2008, he wrote articles for the monthly *La restauration nationale* (which is close to the AF) and participated in a royalist summer camp. In his early days in politics, Darmanin defended a traditionalist Catholic ideology and was attracted to the AF, which in the 20th century was a hotbed of political antisemitism and French fascism. He refused to marry same-sex couples during his tenure in the Tourcoing local government and continues to call for the abolition of “marriage for all.”

The government’s effort to pass laws attacking democratic rights, including the “global security” law, is motivated by the fear of a revolt by the working class, which has already carried out strikes and demonstrations for three years, including the “yellow vest” protests. The “global security” law, which aims to criminalise photographing police, has been denounced by the United Nations as an attack on fundamental democratic rights.

Macron has intensified his anti-Muslim campaign throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exposed the government’s murderous indifference towards lives of the working class. Its policy, which permitted the virus to spread through the population, has resulted in the deaths of almost 100,000 people in France. Its incitement of anti-Muslim hysteria is aimed at dividing the working class and blocking a united workers’ movement against its deadly policy.



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