

French mosque defaced with fascist graffiti amid Macron's anti-Muslim campaign

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The defacing of the Avicenne cultural centre and mosque in the French city of Rennes over the weekend underscores the dangerous implications of the anti-Muslim atmosphere being whipped up by the government of Emmanuel Macron, and its politically criminal character.

The caretaker of the centre found the graffiti at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning as prayers were taking place. The graffiti included anti-Muslim slogans like “No to Islamisation,” as well as fascist and royalist statements, such as “immigration kills,” “The crusades will begin again,” “Long live the king” and “Catholicism religion of the state,” as well as Catholic crosses and the royalist fleur-de-lis.

After news of the attack broke nationally, the government issued a hypocritical condemnation. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin tweeted that “these anti-Muslim inscriptions are unacceptable.” He went to Rennes on Sunday afternoon, where he stated that “the president has asked me to inform the leaders of this association ... of the disgust that these inscriptions inspire in us. All religious houses, all places of religious inspiration are welcome in our country and we owe protection to our Muslim fellow citizens just as to our Christian or Jewish fellow citizens.”

These statements should fool no one. It is the Macron government's anti-Muslim campaign that is creating the political atmosphere directly emboldening openly fascist forces like those who carried out the attack in Rennes. Darmanin himself has played a leading role in this effort.

Among the far-right slogans scrawled on the Rennes mosque was “Greens = traitors,” alluding to the Macron government's ongoing campaign against a local Greens mayor in the Alsace-Lorraine region's city of Strasbourg.

Last month, the mayor voted to allocate \$2.5 million toward the construction of a mosque. The Alsace-Lorraine region is not subject to the 1905 secularism law banning state funding of religious buildings, which went into effect when Alsace-Lorraine was not part of France. The region has previously allocated funding toward Jewish and Christian churches, in larger amounts.

On March 23, Darmanin intervened to build a national political campaign around denunciations of funding for the construction of a mosque. It was centred on the claim that the Greens-led council was supporting “political Islam,” and implicitly allowing foreign powers, notably Turkey, which has ties to the association building the mosque, to conduct political interference in France.

Darmanin denounced the Greens as “a party that is complacent towards radical Islam.” Marlène Schiappa, the junior minister for citizenship, tweeted that “here, clearly, there is an irresponsibility on the part of the Greens. ... In the facts, there is a complicity with political Islam in any case.”

More broadly, the Macron government has led an ever more open campaign restricting the rights of France's Muslim population and promoting an anti-Muslim atmosphere. On Friday, police in Angers reported that they had arrested a 24-year-old man supporting Nazi ideology, after a report that he had threatened to conduct an attack on the Mans mosque and kill multiple people. Police discovered multiple arms where he was living, including a pump-action shotgun. He admitted to making the threat and stated that he had a “hatred for Arabs.”

Macron is currently seeking to pass the “anti-separatism” law, so named to refer to the supposed danger of Islamic “separatism,” which it later renamed

the law “protecting Republican principles.”

The law would establish a “Charter of principles” that Muslim associations are legally obliged to sign, pledging their allegiance to the state. It provides vast powers to the government over religious and all other associations, such as political associations, including the power to dissolve them based on the conduct of individual members. Political discussion inside mosques is banned, and statements denouncing the French state as racist are declared to be defamatory.

Amnesty International last month denounced the “anti-separatism” law as being incompatible with fundamental democratic rights. Katja Rouge of Amnesty stated that “conditioning public funding toward associations on their acceptance of fundamental symbols of the Republic constitutes an illegal restriction on the right to freedom of expression.” The organization has called for the removal of Article 6 of the law, which specifies a “contract of Republican engagement” that every association must submit to.

On March 30, in its first week of debate of the “anti-separatism” law passed by the National Assembly, the Senate voted to amend the bill by banning children under the age of 18 from wearing religious clothing in public—a measure clearly directed at banning the wearing of the veil by young women.

Over the last year, the Macron government has closed more than 70 mosques, promoting a hysterical atmosphere in which mosques are constantly suspected of potentially harbouring terrorist sympathizers.

Darmanin himself denounced even the presence of international foods, such as halal and kosher foods, in separate supermarket aisles, in a television interview conducted in October. In the wake of the Islamist terror attack killing of high school teacher Samuel Paty on October 16, Darmanin declared that he had “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. That’s my opinion—that this is how communalism begins.”

The political context of the Macron government’s increasingly hysterical anti-Muslim campaign is the coronavirus pandemic, which has dramatically intensified social inequality and opposition in the working class over the homicidal policy that the Macron government has pursued in response to the virus. As across the EU, Macron has permitted the virus

to spread throughout the population, leaving schools and non-essential workplaces open in order to prevent any restriction on production and corporate profit-making. Almost 100,000 people in the country have died as a result.

The French ruling class is aware of explosive anger over these conditions and is building up the powers of the state to violently suppress social opposition. The past two years have already witnessed major upheavals in the form of the “yellow vest” protests over social inequality, which were met with riot police, tear gas and rubber bullets.

The Macron government’s anti-Muslim campaign is directed at dividing a movement of the working class along religious lines, and promoting far-right forces that will be used as a repressive arm of the state against social opposition.



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