

Monarchist linked to France's far-right Action française slaps Macron

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On Thursday, a Valence court sentenced Damien Tarel to 18 months in prison, 14 of which were suspended, for having slapped French President Emmanuel Macron at Tain-l'Hermitage on Tuesday, June 8.

Macron was beginning a “tour of France” aiming to meet ordinary people and mayors. Just before 1.30pm, he was visiting a catering school to celebrate the reopening of restaurants and more generally his premature ending of social distancing measures to halt the spread of the virus. As Macron approached members of the public, Tarel struck him while shouting a medieval war cry of the French monarchy: “Montjoie Saint-Denis! Down with Macron’s regime!”

The cry “Montjoie Saint-Denis” used by the French Capetian dynasty’s armies from the 13th century onwards, is a slogan of the royalist far right, especially the Action française.

Shortly before Macron’s arrival, a TMC journalist had interviewed Tarel along with two other persons accompanying him who said they wanted to meet and talk to Macron. Police detained one of them, identified as Arthur C., who was with Tarel when Macron was slapped. AFP reported that the third, named Loïc, said that Tarel is not interested in politics and “doesn’t have those ideas.” This is obviously false.

Police searched the homes of Tarel and Arthur C, both of whom are aged 28, and investigated their online activity. They found medieval weapons, copies of Hitler’s Nazi tract *Mein Kampf* and firearms were found at Arthur C’s residence. Tarel, unemployed and suffering from dyslexia, followed on Facebook the Lyon section of the far-right royalist party Action française and, on YouTube, the far-right channel of Papacito, who has issued death threats against Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s voters.

In court, Tarel identified himself as a right-wing nationalist and said he was carried away by his anger when faced with Macron because “In chivalry, we don’t like lying.” He declared that “Macron represents the degeneration of our country,” and then explained the reason for the monarchist war cry: “It is a reference to the rallying cry of knights, a patriotic slogan. ... Knighthood is a voice. I doubt that if I had challenged Macron to a duel by sword at sunrise that he would have responded.”

Tarel minimized his fascist sympathies, claiming that a photo of himself wearing a Hitler mustache was “just funny” and downplayed the discovery of *Mein Kampf* at Arthur C’s home: “I gave *Mein Kampf* to my friend, he is an enthusiast about the Second World War.”

Tarel claimed he is “keen on the ‘Yellow Vests’ movement, whose voice is no longer heard” and angered by Macron’s policies. “When I saw his falsely friendly look”, he said, “[I understood that he] wanted to get me to vote for him.”

While the “Yellow Vest” movement was no doubt spontaneous and politically very heterogeneous, Tarel’s royalist actions have nothing to do with the aspirations to social equality and the improvement of workers’ conditions which motivated most “Yellow Vests.” This is reflected in the extraordinary reaction of the ruling class to a face slap that landed on its head of state.

The French political establishment, which raged against the “Yellow Vests,” has united around attempts to minimize the royalist sympathies of the individuals who attacked the head of state and hide their far-right connections.

Already on Thursday, Macron repeatedly said that Tarel’s gesture was nothing more than an “isolated act” committed by a few “ultra-violent individuals.”

On Thursday, he even claimed that “it is not so serious to get slapped when approaching a crowd,” adding that such violence permeates society: “It has to be said that this act is just an isolated one and there are people in society today who can be spontaneously violent.” He also launched an appeal to the right-wing feminist movement #MeToo, saying that “real violence isn’t that” but rather the violence suffered by “women who die at the hands of their partner and husband.”

This allowed Marine Le Pen, leader and presidential candidate of the neo-fascist National Rally party, to escape any political attacks linked to this extraordinary incident.

Le Pen felt obliged just after the Macron face slap to declare on BFM-TV and on Twitter: “It is inadmissible to physically attack the President of the Republic. I am the foremost opponent of Emmanuel Macron, but he is the President: he can be politically opposed, but no violence against him can be allowed. I consider this act inadmissible and one that must be roundly condemned in a democracy.”

On Thursday, however, Le Pen said she “agreed” with Macron that the slap was an “isolated act” based on an “ideological mishmash.” In fact, it is a political act motivated by the far-right traditions in which her party is rooted.

On CNews, the far-right commentator Eric Zemmour could declare that Macron only got “what he deserved.” Zemmour added: “He has undermined his own office ... In the French conception of institutions, he is the king, he does not need to get down and dialogue with just anybody in the streets.”

For the Unsubmissive France party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon posted a Tweet expressing the pious hope that this experience would push Macron to take a harder line against threats of neo-fascist violence: “This time are you starting to understand that violent people are in earnest? I am in solidarity with the President.”

In fact, while rejecting extreme right-wing monarchist violence targeting Macron, there is no reason at all to be in solidarity with the French President. It is illusory to expect Macron to fight far-right violence, since it is Macron who has acted throughout his mandate to cultivate far-right forces and use them against workers’ strikes and social protests.

The “republican salute” Macron addressed to Le Pen and her supporters on the evening of his election

victory in 2017 set the tone for his entire term. Functionaries at his Ministry of Culture tried to publish the works of the 20th-century anti-Semitic leader of the Action française, Charles Maurras, a pillar of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime convicted of treason at the Liberation. In 2018, while he was launching the riot police on the “Yellow Vests,” Macron hailed Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain as a “great soldier.”

Currently he has appointed a former sympathizer of the Action française, Gérald Darmanin, to the post of Interior Minister. Darmanin is pushing through parliament anti-democratic laws on “Global Security” and against Islamic “separatism,” claiming he was outraged every time he saw halal or kosher aisles in French grocery stores.

If Macron claims that it is “not serious” for him to be slapped by monarchists, it is because his government, and behind it the financial aristocracy, intend to mobilize far-right forces to defend their obscene fortunes and class privileges against the workers.



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