

After Annecy knife attack, French politicians stoke anti-immigrant hatreds

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Last Thursday, a 31-year-old man armed with a knife attacked a playground in the French town of Annecy. He stabbed four children aged between 2 and 4, as well as two adults. The attacker, identified as Syrian refugee Abdelmasih Hanoun, was shot in the leg and then arrested by police. Following emergency surgical interventions, all the victims of the horrific attacks have survived and are out of intensive care.

According to witness reports, as Hanoun carried out the attack, he shouted the names of his wife, child and Jesus Christ. In his asylum request to French authorities, he identified himself as a Syrian Christian. On Saturday, he was charged with “attempted murder” and “rebellion with a weapon.”

Right-wing The Republicans (LR) party leader Éric Ciotti spoke in the National Assembly minutes after the attack and was reported stating, “It seems that the author has the same profile that we often find in these attacks, it will be necessary to draw all the consequences, without naivety, with force, and in lucidity.”

While the precise motives of the attack are unclear, by the time of the attack Hanoun was clearly a highly distressed individual. Hanoun fled the Syrian war in 2013, in which France and its NATO allies backed Islamist militias facing off against Syrian government troops. After spending time in Turkey he was granted asylum in Sweden. After several failed attempts to gain Swedish citizenship, he left in 2022 and arrived in France. By early 2023, he was reduced to homelessness; four days before the attack, his application for asylum in France was rejected.

This incident has been seized on by the French ruling class to stoke anti-immigrant hatred amid the explosive political crisis caused by Macron’s imposition of pension cuts opposed by the vast majority of the French

people and by millions of workers who struck against the cuts.

There are now growing efforts in the political establishment to revive far-right Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin’s immigration bill and escalate attacks on immigrants and Muslims. Darmanin’s law was initially scrapped by Macron amidst the pension struggle. Macron feared that another round of deeply unpopular and repressive legislation could lead to a social and political explosion that the union bureaucracies and allied pseudo-left parties like Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI) party could not control.

Ciotti told France2 on Friday, “behind this affair, there is a migratory chaos which has a direct link with the increase in violence” before describing his desire to change “French rules and stop submitting to the unsuitable standards” of the EU on immigration.

After the incident, Macron’s ex-Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, who is positioning himself to run in the 2027 election on the LR ticket against Macron, indicated his support for a renegotiation of France’s immigration agreement with Algeria. This agreement has been in place since 1958 and is the mechanism through which millions of workers of Algerian origin came to live and work in France.

Marion Maréchal, director of Eric Zemmour’s fascistic Reconquête party and niece of far-right National Rally leader Marine Le Pen, called for the resignation of Darmanin for being insufficiently tough against immigrants.

In fact, Darmanin, ex-member of the far-right, monarchist Action Française has put in place the far-right’s immigration demands since joining the Macron government. He is continuing to draw up the laws demanded in the manifestos of Zemmour and Le Pen,

including the anti-Muslim law of 2021.

These calls from the far-right to pursue an even more openly repressive immigration policy came just days after President Emmanuel Macron reprimanded Prime Minister Elizabeth Borne for publically recognizing the Nazi-collaborationist origins of Le Pen's far-right National Rally party. Macron has previously described the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime dictator Marshal Pétain as "a good soldier."

While the Annecy knife attack is undoubtedly a horrific and deeply disoriented act of violence, the French ruling elite's outrage over it stinks of hypocrisy.

It is worth recalling its treatment a nearly identical incident in 2021, where William Manot, a French citizen who had far-right beliefs, attacked immigrants with a sword in Paris, seriously injured two. This was ignored in the major newspapers and news channels, and the attacker was released from prison just a year later. In December 2022, just a week and a half after his release, Manot shot dead three Kurds in the Château d'Eau neighbourhood of Paris.

Neither the initial incident, nor the subsequent murder of three Kurdish immigrants led to calls for more protection for immigrants against far-right violence by any of the figures now calling for a further rightward shift of France's immigration laws.

While it lets its right-wing parliamentary allies take the lead on the denunciation of immigrants, for its part, Macron's party seized on the attack to try to suspend all discussion of the president's widely-hated pension bill.

As the attack took place on Thursday morning, deputies in the National Assembly were debating proposed amendments to the pension reform bill, which was forced through without a vote in the chamber in March. Aurore Bergé, a Renaissance Deputy and close ally of Macron, told the press outside that the debate in the National Assembly was a "battle of rag pickers" over "the admissibility or not of amendments" which seems "totally out of step with the dread which in my opinion overwhelms our country."

The calculated reaction to the horrific stabbing incident in Annecy underlines the determination of the French ruling class to utilize every available lever to promote xenophobia. In the short term, this diverts political discussion from Macron's much-hated

pension reform.

More generally, it scapegoats immigrants for the devastating effects of decades-long social attacks on the French and European working class, which are now being accelerated as the imperialist powers slashing social budgets to pay for war against Russia in Ukraine. The European ruling class is seeking to ramp up its vicious anti-immigrant policy, even as it causes the drowning of thousands of innocent refugees each year in the Mediterranean and the Channel.



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