

Right-wing French Twitter campaign over Weinstein affair backs Macron

By Francis Dubois
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The media and President Emmanuel Macron's government are launching an aggressive campaign over "street harassment" of women in the wake of the accusations against US film producer Harvey Weinstein. Since mid-October, it has been spreading ever more rapidly on social media. Initially, it was mainly journalists and media professionals who made mounting allegations of sexual misconduct or criminal activity, under the Twitter hashtags #balancetonporc ("throw out your slob") and #metoo.

The campaign was launched on October 13 by New York-based journalist Sandra Muller. She told *Libération* that, by creating the hashtag #balancetonporc, she wanted to create in France a similar effect as that surrounding the Weinstein affair. Two days later, Macron announced a bill against "street harassment and sexual harassment." The next day, Minister for the Equality of Women and Men Marlène Schiappa confirmed in the Catholic daily *La Croix* that the project was going ahead.

The #balancetonporc campaign asks women to denounce disagreeable encounters with men, without distinguishing criminal activity from boorish behaviour or simple misunderstandings. This creates a witch-hunting media atmosphere, in which public figures are evaluated based on whether or not they support these denunciations.

It is being integrated into the permanent state of emergency and anti-Muslim atmosphere installed by Macron's new anti-terror law. The law against "street harassment" will feature the creation of a "police for everyday security" that will monitor travellers in trains, subways and buses.

In the Weinstein affair, leading US film industry figures have been denounced based on unverified allegations, even from decades ago, and their careers

jeopardized or ruined. Spearheaded by the *Times*, forces close to the Democratic Party are whipping up this campaign. They have been joined by the director of the far-right *Breitbart News* site, Stephen Bannon, a sympathizer of France's neo-fascist National Front (FN). The combined effort represents an attempt to shift US political life far to the right, under the cover of gender politics.

Now, political circles close to Macron aim to import this type of political operation into France. The media widely publicized protests of a few hundred people on October 29, in Paris and other cities across France, around the #metoo hashtag. The government explicitly supported the movement and called for women to press legal charges. "This contributes to freeing them to speak, so it is excellent and it can be a first stage to other things, sometimes towards formally bringing charges," Schiappa said.

The Macron government is setting into motion a movement which can rally support from all types of political forces—from the FN to the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Unsubmissive France (LFI) movement of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. A significant layer of the post-1968 middle class "left" has long used gender politics to promote its career and social interests. It is therefore reacting with enthusiasm to Macron's initiative.

The government, the media and its Twitter campaigns claim to "free women to speak," but the campaign has overwhelmingly reactionary, anti-Muslim overtones. In a September 26 *Libération* interview, several researchers warned that creating a new "street harassment" offense would target "young men from the lower classes and racial minorities who already are especially targeted for police identity checks and violence by the security forces."

The assessment that this campaign targets Muslims is further supported by the recent presentation of two rape charges against Swiss Islamist Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan is a long-standing target of the French far-right. The French Muslim web site *Oumma* cited his lawyers: “The current media climate does not favour justice, and the first cannot substitute itself for the second.” It added, “Certain newspapers and media, rapidly claiming for themselves the role of the judicial machine, have not yet set up the scaffold, but close to it.”

On November 1, *Charlie Hebdo* joined this campaign with an insulting caricature of Ramadan that would not have been out of place in anti-Semitic publications of the 1930s.

Manuel Valls, a former interior and prime minister, hailed the rape charges against Ramadan. He said, “For years, I have been denouncing the duplicity of Tariq Ramadan, now the truth is coming forward thanks to these courageous women. Thank you to them!”

The government of Valls and President François Hollande imposed a state of emergency, had hordes of police assault protesters against its deeply unpopular labour law, and oversaw the police build-up against the population that saw police sexually assault a young North African man, Théo L., in Aulnay-sous-Bois. Now Valls is trying to promote the police, claiming that these forces are in fact protecting French women.

This is not the first time that a sexualized media hysteria has been whipped up, based on a mass of unverified allegations, in order to target Muslims.

When the German ruling class decided in 2015 to respond to the refugee crisis by building up a far-right party, it whipped up a campaign over alleged sexual assaults by North African immigrants on New Year’s Eve in Cologne. Thousands of charges were made, but only 300 led to arrests and 30 to convictions; only three concerned sexual offenses. Most of those convicted were petty criminals who received fines or suspended sentences for stealing phones. Today, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has over 90 seats in the German parliament.

In covering the Twitter campaign, the media totally separate it from the situation of the Macron government, its decrees, its creation of a permanent state of emergency, and preparations for dictatorship visible in its support for an authoritarian regime in

Catalonia. However, it is impossible to understand #balancetonporc outside of this political context.

The French bourgeoisie has been staggered by the political destabilization caused by the election of Trump, the fragmentation of Europe due to Brexit, and the broad popular anger that is rising against its social austerity measures inside France. A poll last year found that a majority of French people believes that the class struggle is a daily reality of life. Six months after his election, Macron has collapsed in the polls; masses of people view him with contempt as the “president of the rich.”

His government is reacting by trying to mobilize hysteria against immigrants and working-class suburbs around the theme of sexual harassment. It aims to rally the political establishment around a combination of feminist propaganda and police-state measures. It is setting out to build an anti-worker movement of the upper middle class, fixated entirely on male-female relations and identity politics—not Macron’s destruction of basic democratic rights, his attack on social spending, and his preparation of war and police-state dictatorship.

For this campaign, Macron is counting especially on the support of the union bureaucracy, Mélenchon, and the NPA and similar middle-class parties. They indicated their support by sending NPA presidential candidate Philippe Poutou and LFI Paris municipal councillor Danielle Simonet to the October 29 #metoo rally.

The neo-fascists, for their part, have rapidly sized up the anti-harassment campaign and decided to give it critical support. The FN declared they would support Macron’s new sexual police, which it claimed “can have meaning on such issues if you ask the right questions about who are the aggressors,” that is, if the finger is directly pointed at refugees, immigrants and Muslims.

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