

Macron threatens to criminalize opposition to Zionism in France

By Will Morrow
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With each passing day, it is more obvious that the French ruling establishment's campaign against anti-Semitism is merely a smokescreen for a reactionary agenda, carried out in alliance with far-right forces, to expand police powers and suppress left-wing opposition among workers.

On Wednesday evening, French President Emmanuel Macron addressed the 34th annual dinner of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in Paris. Echoing positions of the far right, his speech cast anti-Semitism as being principally associated with Muslims and left-wing, anti-capitalist sentiment in the working class.

Macron announced that his government will change its definition of anti-Semitism—that is, racist hatred against Jews—to include opposition to Zionism, the right-wing nationalist political perspective of creating a separate Israeli state.

Anti-Semitic hate speech is a crime in France, and Macron's redefinition threatens to criminalize all criticism of Israel's policies, including its murderous attacks against defenseless Palestinian civilians and war threats against Iran. While Macron said the penal code would not be changed, he said the change in the definition will "reaffirm the practices of our law enforcement, judges and teachers."

Also under the banner of combating "hate speech," Macron said that in May he will introduce a new bill targeting internet freedom. It would improve the government's ability to censor overseas websites, which, he said, "switching servers regularly, are very difficult to block today."

Macron aggressively denounced online anonymity—i.e., the ability of individuals to use the internet without having their thoughts and statements monitored by the government. "The question of

anonymity will obviously be raised," he said. "Too often, it is the mask of cowards. And behind every pseudonym, there is a name, a face, an identity."

These measures have nothing to do with combating anti-Semitism. The government is building up its surveillance and censorship powers in response to growing opposition to social inequality and austerity in the working class, which has found an initial expression in mass "yellow vest" protests organized via Facebook and other social media.

Macron stressed the importance of his government's recently announced censorship collaboration with Facebook. Beginning this year, government officials are being placed at the heart of Facebook's content censorship offices, with no public oversight of what statements they are removing from social media.

It is all the more absurd and politically obscene for Macron to cloak this program in the flag of fighting "anti-Semitism." He has worked to rehabilitate French fascism, declaring last November that Philippe Pétain, the head of the Vichy collaborationist regime that organized the mass murder of Jews in France, was a "great soldier."

The official campaign over "anti-Semitism" has escalated since last Saturday, when a protester, whom police subsequently declared was under surveillance for adhering to an extremist Islamic movement, confronted Alain Finkelkraut, a right-wing Zionist political commentator who is Jewish, using foul language and denouncing him as a Zionist.

The statement of a single individual is now being used to tar the entire "Yellow Vest" protest with the accusation of anti-Semitism, though these protests have been animated from the outset by left-wing opposition to social inequality. A central goal of this campaign is to counter broad sympathy for the demonstrations

among workers and young people.

The most striking element of the official campaign is the manner in which, under the banner of combating anti-Semitism, an alliance is being formed with neo-fascistic parties that are the political descendants of the forces responsible for the mass murder of Jews in the Holocaust.

Macron spoke just one day after protests called by the Socialist Party (PS) against the alleged anti-Semitism of the “yellow vests,” joined by virtually the entire political establishment. They were attended not only by the PS and most of Macron’s ministers, The Republicans, the Communist Party of France, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the bourgeois “left” Unsubmissive France. The PS also invited Marine Le Pen, the head of the neo-fascist National Rally (RN) who only two years ago declared that “France was not responsible” for the Vel d’Hiv round-up of Jews for deportation from Paris in 1942.

If Le Pen’s star is rising rapidly at present in the political establishment, it is because her party expresses most consistently the militarism, nationalism and repression with which the ruling elite intends to respond to domestic political opposition. She is focusing her propaganda at present on aggressively attacking Muslims. Declining to attend the PS protest on Tuesday, she charged that the major parties “either have done nothing against the spread of Islamist networks in popular neighborhoods, or encouraged them...”

Such filth now sets the tone for official politics. Macron’s speech on Wednesday repeatedly warned about the growth of “radical Islam” and called for stepped up policing of working-class neighborhoods.

“This ideology grows like gangrene in certain suburbs,” he said, calling for a “Republican conquest of these territories.” The official campaign over anti-Semitism is emerging ever more openly as a racist attack against Muslims justifying repression of working people.

Macron tried to hide that this campaign is an onslaught against left wing opposition, presenting it as an even-handed struggle against political extremes. “Note well the different forms that it [anti-Semitism] takes,” he said. “The hatred of the Jew is at the same time the hatred of the communist and the capitalist ... Anti-Semitism in all its forms is nourished by the

extremes.”

These statements are falsifications. Anti-Semitism is historically the ideology of fascism, which carried out murderous attacks on communists. But its violent nationalism is incompatible with any genuine left-wing politics, let alone socialist opposition to capitalism in the working class. It was and remains the province above all of the far right, which is now growing thanks to support inside the same political establishment that is denouncing the “yellow vests.”

This was confirmed by a recent report published by the German government, documenting the alarming growth of anti-Semitic attacks in Germany. Despite claims by the entire political establishment that anti-Semitism is predominately “imported” by immigrants, it found that the overwhelming majority of anti-Semitic attacks were carried out by extreme-right groups (see: “Anti-Semitic and far-right violence on the rise in Germany”).

Macron’s equation of anti-Semitism with all “extremes” is aimed at declaring that the left, and all social opposition in the working class, is inherently anti-Semitic and so essentially criminal. Referring to anti-Semitism, he said that “in the times we are in, other forms [of hatred] are rising with it,” including hatred “against elected officials, against authority, against parliamentarism.”

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