

Roman Polanski gets César for best director for *J'Accuse*, in repudiation of #MeToo

By Alex Lantier
29 February 2020

Last night, the César film awards named Roman Polanski best director for *J'Accuse*, defying the diktat of both the #MeToo movement and of President Emmanuel Macron's government.

J'Accuse is a powerful and compelling film on the Dreyfus Affair, the historic 1894-1906 struggle to clear a French Jewish officer framed on charges of spying for Germany. This struggle escalated into a confrontation between the *dreyfusards*, whose most consistent proponent was the socialist workers movement led by Jean Jaurès, and the *antidreyfusards* led by the proto-fascistic *Action française* of Charles Maurras. At the high point of the Dreyfus Affair, France teetered on the brink of civil war.

Though the film deals with a subject which has the universal sympathy and interest of left-minded workers in France, *J'Accuse* and Polanski became the target of relentless attacks from #MeToo and the state. These were based on unsubstantiated allegations by actress Valérie Monnier, which she closely coordinated with the Macron government before the film's release, that Polanski raped her in 1975. #MeToo supporters in France made the fascistic argument that to be interested in seeing *J'Accuse* therefore meant being complicit in rape.

The media atmosphere became so toxic that Polanski and the entire cast of *J'Accuse* decided it was too dangerous to attend the César ceremony and avoided the event. In a shameless attempt to impose the Macron government's right-wing politics on the film community, Culture Minister Franck Riester personally intervened on the eve of the awards ceremony to demand that Polanski not be named best director.

Under these conditions, the Academy's decision to award Polanski the best director prize is an unmistakable repudiation of the politics of #MeToo and

of the Macron government.

When *J'Accuse* was named for 12 César awards last month, #MeToo supporters orchestrated a successful campaign, supported by Macron government ministers, to force the resignation of the French Film Academy's entire governing council. After this awards ceremony, a new governing council is to be elected, including a mass recruitment of hundreds of new female members.

#MeToo and state propaganda against *J'Accuse* spread across the media in the run-up to the final vote on the César awards and the awards ceremony itself. Actress Adèle Haenel, a #MeToo supporter in France, declared that giving awards to Polanski means "to spit in the face of every victim. ... It means, 'It is not so serious to rape women.'"

Actress Rose McGowan, a leading #MeToo figure in America, then piled on to hysterically denounce Polanski to the magazine *Paris-Match*: "The nominations for Polanski make me want to take a César award and hit each person who voted for him. We are not talking about cinema, but pain. ... Those people have no idea what goes on in the real world, they support the status quo, the celebration of triumphant masculinity."

It was announced that mass protests by feminist groups would be held in front of Pleyel Hall, where the César awards ceremony were held.

Faced with relentless and uncontrolled slanders in the media targeting him as a despicable rapist, Polanski announced on Wednesday that he would not attend the César awards ceremony.

He said, "I have been asked this question: will I go or not to the César awards ceremony? My question is rather the following: how could I go? We know how this evening is to proceed. Activists are already threatening me with a public lynching. Some are

announcing there will be protests in front of Pleyel Hall. Others plan to use it as a way to justify campaigning to reform the governance of French film. It will look more like a symposium than a cinema festival seeking to reward its greatest talents.”

Polanski added that he was acting out of a duty to “protect my family, my wife and my children, who are forced to endure insults and humiliations.” He added that it was “with regret that I am taking this decision, that is, to avoid being tried by a self-appointed court of public opinion ready to trample legal rights underfoot so that irrationalism can triumph again unchallenged.”

Yesterday morning, Culture Minister Franck Riester went on France Info to demand that Polanski not receive the prize for best director. If Polanski received an award, Riester claimed, it would be “a bad symbol for the necessary development of consciousness that we must all make in the struggle against sexual and sexist violence.” He added, “It is up to each and every voting members ... to act on the basis of this responsibility.”

Riester also rejoiced that Polanski had to take the decision, which Riester called “wise,” to not attend the awards ceremony. Riester said, “After everything that has taken place for many years, for a certain number of women who claim Roman Polanski assaulted them, his presence tonight would obviously have been a source of tension.”

After Riester’s extraordinary public intervention, the entire cast and production staff of *J’Accuse* announced that it would not attend the Césars award ceremony. Polanski, producer Alain Goldman, and actors Jean Dujardin, Louis Garrel and Emmanuelle Seigner, who is also Polanski’s wife, all were absent during last night’s awards ceremony.

Goldman told AFP: “We have seen an escalation of inappropriate and violent remarks and behavior. The culture minister himself, representing the authority of the state, has permitted himself to make a statement condemning in advance and without knowledge of its outcome, a professional, independent and secret vote.”

And during the awards ceremony, several hundred protesters from the Dare To Be Feminist association and allied organizations tried to forcibly enter Pleyel Hall, facing off with riot police. They shouted the fascist slogan “Polanski is a rapist, cinemas are guilty, filmgoers are complicit,” brandishing signs reading “We believe Polanski’s victims” and “Down

with Patriarchy.”

Dare To Be Feminist spokeswoman Céline Piques told AFP: “We want to shake up the film community because they claim to support Adèle Haenel, who denounces sexual assault, but at the same time and with incredible hypocrisy, they support Roman Polanski.”

Ultimately, however, and at the end of a ceremony largely given over to talk of gender politics and women in film, it was announced that Polanski had received the best director prize. Haenel and a dozen other #MeToo supporters booed and marched out of Pleyel Hall in protest.

It was a blunt repudiation of #MeToo witch-hunting and Macron’s policies of social austerity, war, police-state repression, and rehabilitating Nazi-collaborationist dictator Philippe Pétain.

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