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France

Faced with the new “republican arc”, we need more than ever to unite our class

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It is by no means trivial that Mediapart has named one of its sections “The Middle East: repercussions in France”, with a recent article on “The leaden weight that descended on universities” after 7 October, and another on the divisions between editorial boards!

In themselves, given the poisonous atmosphere since 7 October and the surprise of the Hamas attacks, these articles speak volumes about the political climate in France.

A witch-hunt atmosphere

However, their recent existence suggests a (very slight) improvement in public debate. In other words, the climate is one of witch-hunting and the use of all kinds of slander and intellectual shortcuts to sell the government’s line that “in the face of terrorism, Israel had the right to defend itself”.

After 7 October, we had to fight to ensure that the context of over 75 years of struggle against the settlements was brought back to the fore. Anyone who dared to do so on television was suspected not just of explaining but of justifying the killing of civilians. For the Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin, and his prefects, anyone who supported Palestinian resistance was a potential terrorist.

It has to be said that the murder of teacher Dominique Bernard in Arras on 13 October by a fanatical young man served to electrify government action and the media climate.

The BBC in Britain had to justify not using the term “terrorism” as early as 12 October. AFP (Agence France-Presse) also had to account for this at the end of October. And just recently, we learned that the AFP editorial staff was very divided.

For a month, whether or not you denounced Hamas as a terrorist made you a “good” or “bad” citizen. Our organization, the NPA, was not spared by the media storm... and even the legal storm. The publication director of the NPA website was summoned to an open hearing on 2 November because of a report of “apology for terrorism” by associations. [1] While there is no doubt that Hamas’s war crimes are shocking and even terrorizing, the term “terrorist” to describe Hamas is not a precise political characterization and we do not endorse it.

On 21 November, Guillaume Meurice, the France Inter humorist, was also summoned for an open hearing for having made a joke about Benjamin Netanyahu. Before him, activists for the Palestinian cause had also been summoned for the same reasons for speaking out at rallies.

Such a climate is unprecedented in terms of both its media and legal-political scope. Chirac’s former Prime Minister, Dominique de Villepin, himself came across as an iconoclast on certain television programmes, referring to the failure to respect international law and diplomatic solutions.

This climate has been compounded by intense repression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Criminalizing solidarity

In many towns, rallies organized by support groups were banned until at least 20 October because of the risk of “disturbing the peace”. And when the NPA called and was one of the organizers of the demonstration, the police chiefs did not hesitate to quote our first press release as proof that the demonstration was dangerous.

In Paris, the first authorized demonstration called by associations in support of Palestine, trade unions such as the CGT and Solidaires, and political organizations only took place on 22 October, bringing together nearly 20,000 people in a very calm atmosphere.

However, the following week, rallies were again banned, resulting in fines for hundreds of people. The prefecture put the number at over 1,000.

Finally, the ultimate symptom of unjust repression, was the expulsion of Mariam Abu Daqqa, an activist with the PFLP - an organization that the European Union and France class as a terrorist organization - on 10 November, when she was due to travel to Cairo the following day. This could only be interpreted as a further humiliation for supporters of the Palestinian cause.

Having arrived in France at the end of September for a series of conferences, Mariam Abu Daqqa was issued with an expulsion order on 9 October, which was challenged by the interim relief judge of the administrative court, who ruled on 20 October that “the Minister of the Interior has seriously and manifestly illegally infringed freedom of expression and freedom of movement”. However, on 8 November, the Conseil d’État overturned this, confirmed the order and the expulsion of Mariam Abu Daqqa, who was arrested within hours.

While the French state used all the administrative means at its disposal, the political debate continued its hellish course, which reached its climax on 12 November with the demonstration against anti-Semitism called by Yaël Braun-Pivet, President of the National Assembly, and Gérard Larcher, President of the Senate.

Terrorism and anti-Semitism: a new “republican arc”

After associating all supporters of the Palestinian cause with the crimes of 7 October and therefore with terrorism, supporters of the State of Israel were able to discredit their opponents by attributing anti-Semitic intentions to them, and by confusing anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, starting on 8 October.

The double standard on all the TV channels and the emotional one-upmanship enabled this discourse to find an audience, one of the first victims of which was La France insoumise and, in particular, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who never wanted to talk about terrorism.

LFI, which has deputies in the National Assembly, has become unattractive to all the other parties to its right. Even Europe Écologie les Verts, the Socialist Party and the French Communist Party, with whom however an alliance had been sealed in June 2022 for the legislative elections, have sought to distance themselves at all costs from the positioning of Mélenchon’s movement.

Under pressure, the Macron government has declared its unconditional support for Israel, because France has taken

this line since the Sarkozy presidency. State Islamophobia has probably also contributed to these positions for Franco-French reasons.

The “republican front”, which used to exclude the Front National (FN), has been replaced by the concept of the “republican arc”, which sidelined LFI, first in the Assembly and then in the streets on 12 November.

The new “republican arc” against anti-Semitism therefore includes the far right, which is constantly exploiting the conflict for Islamophobic ends, in alliance with the Zionist far right. While 12 November was not a great success for the Macron government and the right, with 105,000 people in Paris, it was a triumph for the far right, now legitimized.

That very morning, to express their fight against anti-Semitism, young people from student unions, LFI and the Jeunesses anticapitalistes had called for a wreath-laying ceremony at the Place des Martyrs Juifs du Vélodrome d’Hiver. There were just over a hundred of us. The Zionist far right had planned ahead: to prevent us from honouring the memory by shouting slogans such as “First, second, third generation, we are all children of deportees” or “You won’t get our dead”. It’s true that when the French far right, heir to a political tradition that goes back to Vichy and the ratonnades orchestrated by Papon, marches against anti-Semitism, it’s not surprising to see the left discredited in all its battles... in the greatest confusion.

This grey and rainy day on 12 November will therefore have been dull right up to the end and should give all activists the desire to rebuild the balance of power...

The left, the concrete organization of solidarity with Palestine

If there’s one lesson to be learned about the balance of power, it’s that the Council of State’s failure to dissolve Soulèvements de la Terre on 9 November owes everything to the mobilization of its activists and the support of environmental, trade union and political organizations. Unlike the smaller Gale (Groupe antifasciste Lyon et environs).

The movement continued to develop in the cities and in Paris, in particular around the Collectif national pour une paix juste et durable, created in 2000, and also around Urgence Palestine.

Numerous debates are taking place on concrete actions in solidarity with the Palestinian people, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism in general. A new generation is in the process of becoming politicized, while the older ones are making new experiences. The political debate of recent weeks is reshuffling the cards... for those who want to build a new society.

More than ever, as we say at the NPA, now is the time to be united and revolutionary, to build, without sectarianism, the tools for the emancipation of our class, a future of peace, without colonies. An ecosocialist future!

27 November 2023

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[1] See *l'Anticapitaliste*, 3 novembre 2023 "[Solidarité avec les Palestiniens : le NPA convoqué par la police judiciaire](#)".