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**France**

# **Our pain is immense, and the scavengers are here**

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**Horror, shock, dread : this is what we feel faced with the assassination of Samuel Paty, who taught of history and geography at the Collège du Bois d'Aulne in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, by a fanatical murderer. This death is atrocious. It is atrocious in absolute terms, the death of a man killed in the middle of the street. It is atrocious because of the appalling way in which the murder was committed: by beheading. And also, because its author justified it by referring to the lesson given by Samuel Paty on freedom of expression, during which he presented his students with a caricature of Mohammed ; that a lesson could lead to a murder is unbearable.**

Unanimously, the national education unions expressed their support for Samuel Paty's relatives, his students, his colleagues. The press release from the National Education inter-union coordination immediately stressed: "The time has come for mourning, reflection and solidarity."

In reality, in an even more virulent way than after the attacks of January and November 2015, the way this death has been instrumentalized at the highest level of the state and by a whole range of forces - ranging from the *Printemps Républicain* to the *Rassemblement National* and to *Génération Identitaire*, through dozens of editorial writers - absolutely prevents this necessary reflection. [1] This is largely why we are writing this article : because the flood of hatred that has been unleashed, targeting Muslims (but also those who are perceived as their allies, who are therefore, in the language of the far right "traitors to the fatherland"), makes mourning difficult if not impossible, as well as serious reflection on the causes of this assassination and the means to confront it.

Participants in the rally organized at Place de la République were able to testify to this. Samia Orosemane recounts what happened to her in the crowd because she was wearing a headscarf : "A woman approached me looking at me in a very hostile way. She pointed her finger at me and said : 'Gang of assassins!' I smiled at her, but I felt like crying." Insults, death threats (including threats of beheading), attacks along the lines of "collabo!" or "Do you know what we were doing to women collaborators in '44?" rained down. We could read again the word "rats" to designate Muslims. And the delirium was expressed calmly on all sorts of channels, as when on 19 October on Sud Radio, a guest suggested that there should be one paratrooper per class, armed with a P35 ...

This hatred, which goes as far as calling for murder, also takes the very concrete form of a sordid political instrumentalization. On the morning of 19 October the Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin announced that he would propose to dissolve the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF). This is a serious threat, even though it is unlikely to be acted upon as it is obviously devoid of any legal basis. If such a dissolution were nevertheless to be pronounced, it would certainly constitute an opening shot and presage an offensive against the whole social movement.

By also attacking BarakaCity, a humanitarian NGO fighting against poverty, Darmanin asserted that it was a question of "associations that were enemies of the Republic" and claimed that the CCIF was directly involved in the assassination of Samuel Paty. The CCIF, made up of lawyers and defenders of human rights, acts by carrying out legal work against discrimination and by listing every year the number of Islamophobic acts. These organizations have become the target of a campaign of hatred and death threats. This is all the more indecent since everything is being done in the name of the fight to defend "freedom of expression".

Similarly, they attack the Observatory of Secularism, in particular Jean-Louis Bianco and Nicolas Cadène, guilty according to some - from the *Printemps Républicain* to the magazine *Le Point* through members of the government -

of defending a “laxist” vision of secularism. What they are reproached with in reality is not having accepted in recent years the instrumentalization and deviation of a principle aimed - if we follow the first two articles of the law of 1905 - at ensuring religious freedom and guaranteeing the neutrality of the state, therefore the equal treatment of citizens (regardless of whether they believe or not, or what they believe in).

This political instrumentalization is abject, as is demonstrated by the procession on our TV sets of political leaders, from Manuel Valls to Marine Le Pen. Valls, the very one who posed with the Prince of Saudi Arabia to sell him Mirage 2000s, Caesar guns, combat helicopters and Leclerc tanks. We know that France is the main supplier of weapons to Saudi Arabia, which is plunging Yemen into destruction and famine. Air attacks against vital infrastructure, hospitals, schools, markets, claim thousands of victims. But all that is far away.

The far right has been on the offensive for several days, aided in this by media which, like CNews, open their doors wide to it every day. However, it was in fact a former member of the security service of the *Front National*, Claude Herman, who supplied the arms to Amedy Coulibaly for the murderous attack carried out against the Hyper Kacher in 2015. It was also a former candidate of the *Front National* who tried to set fire to a mosque in Bayonne and seriously injured two Muslims. And we could further evoke the fact that the head of security of Lafarge - who apparently negotiated with Daesh, with complete impunity - was also a candidate of the FN .

This is not mentioned in the current debates, and, during this time, it is anti-racist organizations like the CCIF which are threatened with dissolution. The instrumentalization is so sickening that we cannot help thinking that the atrocious assassination of Samuel Paty by a fanatic has become for some people an opportunity. And even a godsend. There is a name for these people: scavengers.

The editorialist Christophe Barbier expressed this instrumentalization frankly, declaring "Let us take advantage of this tragedy" and proposing in this sense a new liberticide law Avia. The attacks that are under way are already liberticide: Darmanin announced police operations against dozens of people who "do not necessarily have a link with the investigation but to whom we want to send a message". The law on "separatism" that is in preparation will meanwhile increase and legalize discrimination, if we do not prevent it. In this context, it is unworthy that Jean-Luc Mélenchon decided to target the "Chechen community" by asserting that there was a "problem" with this "community". Mélenchon quickly apologized on this subject, and we can only welcome that.

The dripping hypocrisy of suddenly supporting teachers is also vile. The same people did not have a word to say about the suicide of Christine Renon, not a word of support for all the colleagues who are in distress in the face of the steamroller of counter-reforms which affect education. The same people who, like Jean-Michel Blanquer, forge and apply these counter-reforms, pursue and track down the teachers who oppose them, like the Melle Four. Several collectives of teachers invited people, during the rally on Sunday 18 October, to ostensibly turn their backs on Blanquer. This same Blanquer has found nothing better than this indignity: while they have just lost a colleague, he attacks teachers head-on, accusing the universities of "Islamо-leftism", a word that he shamelessly borrows from the far right.

It is very clear : “mourning, reflection and solidarity” are made difficult if not impossible for the thousands of people who wish to come together to pay homage to Samuel Paty and find themselves surrounded by vultures who call for national union - we know how deadly that can be - while stirring up hatred against Muslims and anti-racist activists.

We can see in passing to what extent Islamophobia works in conjunction with authoritarianism, by legitimizing all limitations of democratic rights and public freedoms. [2] Thus we hear editorialists now explicitly vituperating against the rule of law, such as Elisabeth Lévy who can say without trembling: “It is the rule of law which is synonymous with our disarmament. [...] We are tied up by our discourse on human rights. [...] Caught up in the rights that are always for those who attack us.”

Such ideologues are so mediocre that they are only worth anything as symptoms of an authoritarian radicalization of the class they embody, in the same way as Luc Ferry's call for the police to "use their weapons" against the Yellow Vests sounded like a cry from the heart of a whole section of the bourgeoisie. We could laugh at the ridiculous comments of Darmanin saying he was "shocked" by the shelves of "community cuisine" in the supermarkets (because they are supposedly a first step towards "separatism"). [3] But it has not been pointed out sufficiently that the opposition between a cosmopolitan capitalism (which by selling foreign products addresses itself, he tells us, to "low instincts") and what he calls "patriotic capitalism", clearly stems from fascist rhetoric. [4]

By the way, the argument used by Darmanin is so grotesque that one is tempted to think that it also aims to make people forget the bankruptcy of the police and the intelligence services. Samuel Paty knew he was being threatened and had lodged a complaint: a note from the Yvelines territorial intelligence service had been drawn up and sent, but the threat was clearly not taken seriously. In addition, as revealed by Mediapart, the author of the assassination had already published on 30 August a photomontage depicting the beheading of a man. His account was reported to the Pharos platform, but it was not subsequently followed up, despite the fact that he had been in contact for months with a terrorist group. Abdoullakh Anzorov, as we now know, was not a "lone wolf" since he had been in contact for months with members of a terrorist group active in Syria, in addition to the role of a fundamentalist militant (who is, furthermore, is not unrelated to French fascists) in the targeting of Samuel Paty. [5]

We have also seen Valérie Pécresse, a former minister and a figure of the right, asking to "close any mosque which does not clearly and publicly condemn this abject crime". Will Madame Pécresse ask, during the next attack committed by a supremacist claiming to defend whites and Christians, that all whites and all Christian churches condemn "clearly and publicly" such an attack? Did she do that when Anders Breivik killed nearly 80 people in 2011 in Norway or, more recently, when Brenton Tarrant murdered 51 Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand? We should not even have to ask such an absurd question.

What seems obvious, given the racist and authoritarian outburst of recent days in several media and on social networks, on the part of media ideologues and political professionals, is that political authorities and the far right are engaged in a real shock strategy. [6] This consists of taking advantage of people's disorientation and fear, further accentuated by the health context in which we have been living for months, to multiply measures that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to impose in an ordinary context. These directly attack Muslim and anti-racist organizations in particular, but also delegitimize, by dragging it through the mud, the social and political left which has supported the struggles against police crimes and against Islamophobia in the recent past (hence the detestation, unanimous in the main media outlets, of la France Insoumise and the UNEF student union).

Thus they are seeking to settle accounts, and we probably do not understand anything about the systematic and violent nature of the attacks - including the latest, despicable one, of Bruckner accusing Rokhaya Diallo of having "armed the killers" of Charlie Hebdo - if we do not take into account the progression of anti-racist struggles in the last period, marked both by the imposing march against Islamophobia on 10 November last year [7], and the biggest demonstrations that France has known against police crimes in June, amid a worldwide wave of anti-racist protest following the murder of George Floyd.

What is even more serious is that by practicing such an Islamophobic instrumentalization of the immense emotion aroused by the assassination of Samuel Paty, by accentuating the colonial logic of perceiving Muslims as an internal enemy and a "fifth column" (an expression that Nadine Morano has moreover recently used), these scavengers make us enter precisely into the logic desired by terrorist groups like Daesh (although it is probably not theorized so explicitly): isolate Muslims in European societies, a situation that these groups imagine they can exploit by presenting themselves as saviours.

For our part, we associate ourselves with what CGT Educ'action wrote in a statement: "The school system will never

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be able, on its own, to heal the fractures of a society undermined by social inequalities and discrimination. Its role of collective and individual emancipation can only be truly accomplished by working for a real and profound transformation of society based on social justice and real equality.”

24 October 2020

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Contretemps](#).

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[1] Printemps Républicain was initiated by rightwing SP members to protect "French identity". Rassemblement national is the new name of the Front national, France's major far-right party. Génération identitaire is a white-supremacist, islamophobic far right group. IVP

[2] *Contretemps*, 21 July 2020 ["Dossier : l'islamophobie entre racisme d'État, refoulé colonial et nationalisme identitaire"](#).

[3] France Info, 21 October 2020 ["Gérald Darmanin se dit "choqué" par les rayons de "cuisine communautaire" dans les hypermarchés"](#).

[4] *Contretemps*, 28 September 2020 ["Fascisme. Fascisation. Antifascisme"](#).

[5] *Horde*, 20 Octàber 2020 ["À propos d'Abdelhakim Sefrioui et du collectif Cheikh Yassine"](#).

[6] *Télérama*, 20 October 2020 ["Après le meurtre de Samuel Paty, le concours Lépine des idées d'extrême droite"](#).

[7] *Contretemps*, 27 November 2019 ["Retour sur la Marche contre l'islamophobie. Entretien avec Omar Slaouti"](#).