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By Anthony Torres
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Former neo-fascist candidate attacks mosque in French city of Bayonne

Amid the relentless whipping up of anti-Muslim sentiment by the media and the established parties, an 84-year-old former candidate of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) attacked a mosque in Bayonne in southwestern France on Monday of last week, wounding two people.

At around 3:25 pm, Claude Sinké arrived in front of the Bayonne mosque armed with a can of gas. As he tried to set fire to the door to the mosque, he was confronted by two people and shot at them, wounding both, before he managed to set fire to a car parked near the mosque. He then fled. He was arrested by the Anti-Criminality Brigade (BAC) at his home in Saint-Martin-de-Seignanx, approximately 10 kilometers from Bayonne.

While under arrest, Sinké, a former soldier and retiree from the public school system, declared that he had weapons and grenades. A de-mining squad went through his car and his house, where weapons were found. A handgun was found inside his car. After his arrest he was placed in preventive detention on charges of attempted murder.

The two victims, aged 74 and 78, were both seriously wounded, shot in the chest, the neck and the arm. They were hospitalized and reportedly face long-term health consequences.

According to BFM-TV, Sinké was an FN (now renamed National Rally—RN) candidate for the Landes Department in 2015. An acquaintance of Sinké explained: “He promoted racist and xenophobic ideas and he did not hide this fact. He could be a very nice guy, except when he talked about politics. Then he would get angry and could become verbally violent.”

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The RN took its distance from Sinké in the communiqué it published on the issue, declaring: “After this election, Sinké was expelled from his departmental federation for having adopted positions that were considered contrary to the spirit and political line of the National Rally. He has not, since then, had the least participation in any action of our movement and is no longer a member.”

On Twitter, President Emmanuel Macron cynically condemned “the odious attack perpetrated in front of the Bayonne mosque.” He continued: “The Republic will never tolerate hate. Everything will be set into motion to punish the perpetrators and protect our compatriots of the Muslim faith. I pledge to do this.”

Several witnesses testified that Sinké had serious psychological difficulties. According to the mayor’s assistant, Mike Bresson, Sinké often submitted complaints to City Hall and “appeared somewhat psychologically disturbed.” The *Sud Ouest* daily refused to publish a recent letter in which he declared that he wanted to sue Macron, saying Sinké’s letter was “discriminatory and xenophobic.”

Nonetheless, the entire political and media establishment bear heavy political responsibility for this event. They have created the filthy political climate that encourages the most unstable and right-wing elements to carry out such attacks.

The attack on the Bayonne mosque took place a few weeks after Macron called for the “eradication” of Islamism in a speech delivered after the knife attack at the Paris police prefecture.

Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer has called for the banning of the Muslim veil on school trips. And at the “Convention of the Right” meeting organized by neo-fascist Marion Maréchal Le Pen, Éric Zemmour, the far-right publicist convicted of inciting racial hatred, called for a war to liberate France from an “Islamic occupation.”

Sinké reportedly referred to Zemmour’s writings in posts on social media.

Article continues below the form

The anti-Muslim campaign targets not only the millions of people in France and across Europe who consider themselves to be religiously or culturally Muslim, but the entire working class. By seeking to whip up an anti-Muslim hysteria, it sets out to create a political climate for Macron to set up a police state under cover of a so-called “war on terror.”

The security forces violently repress demonstrations, place people under house arrest and fire workers who have no proven links to Islamism, simply by claiming that they have undergone “radicalization.”

Attempts by sections of the established parties to distance themselves from the political campaign targeting Muslims are shot through with hypocrisy. Not only the neo-fascists, but the entire ruling elite has participated in a barely veiled incitement of Islamophobia.

On BFM TV, Clémentine Autain of Jean-Luc Melenchon’s Unsubmissive France (LFI), said: “The government does not hesitate to use the issue of the veil and Islam to prevent social questions from occupying the centre of the public debate. This is becoming extremely dangerous: We are playing with fire and I think it is the responsibility of left, progressive forces to succeed in provoking a mobilization and not accept everything. We wonder how far the aggression and now the very violent acts against French Muslims will go. It is a problem that we must deal with collectively.”

But notwithstanding the warnings made by Autain, the struggle against the public campaign and attacks on Muslims can be carried out only in opposition to Autain’s party.

LFI leaders have for a considerable period participated in anti-Islamic campaigns, in promoting imperialist wars, and in denouncing veiled women. At its summer school this year, LFI organized a meeting on the “right to be Islamophobic,” which was run by philosopher Henry Penz-Ruiz. Backed by large sections of the LFI, he claimed that it was possible to endow Islamophobia with a progressive content.

The WSWS explained that the LFI’s debate on the “right to be an Islamophobe” was the product of the anti-Marxist and right-wing orientation that predominates among layers of the affluent middle class within which this party has its social base. Nationalist parties like the LFI are hostile to the millions of workers who are entering into struggle internationally. Whereas tens of millions have demonstrated their common opposition to inequality and capitalist governments, forces such as the LFI are seeking to divide workers by inciting xenophobic moods.

It is only by mobilizing against nationalist populism that workers will be able to counteract and oppose the reactionary political atmosphere in which Sinké carried out his attack on the Bayonne mosque.

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