

FROM UNIVERSALISM TO RACIALISM: MACRON'S MOST RECENT U-TURN ON EDUCATION

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suffering from racial tensions, Macron gives the unsettling impression that France's decadence is a settled issue.

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Macron's re-election left a deliquescent image of France, the portrait of an atomised country divided along generational, social and economic lines. Divisions were even felt on religious lines, as the vast majority of French Muslims voted for Mélenchon's extreme left-wing party thus turning admonishment against the fast spread of '*islamo-gauchisme*' in the country into a self-fulfilling prophecy. This new left scored 23% of the ballots in the presidential run and might actually take an even higher proportion of seats in the upcoming legislative elections according to the polls.

Will this prove enough to dispute Macron's majority in the French national assembly? Yes—enough, at least, to put the newly elected president on frayed nerves and make him lean on his left to hunt on far-left territory.

It has been a long time since Macron's '*en même temps*'—his chameleonic ability to blur the lines—mutated into a cynical (and successful) political weapon, even at the price of bluntly contradicting himself if need be. To him, securing a majority in the National Assembly is worth another political contortion to attract voters that find him too conservative for their urban-woke tastes.

Macron, conservative? Strictly speaking, no, not at all. Yet, his political versatility led him to nominate and keep throughout his first mandate a minister of education that did the job, did not shy away from putting France's education back on track, and sticking to the classic republican values. Jean-Michel Blanquer was the closest to a conservative minister in

Macron's government and a guarantee of common sense and political probity.

During his term, Blanquer spoke up about excellency, teacher's authority and put back reading, writing and maths at the core of the curricula to the detriment of 'new-age' pedagogies. He also stood up for the classics, for knowledge over skills, promoted music and choirs and, most importantly, spearheaded the fight against 'cancel culture.' With the exception of its controversial decision on the recognition of 'trans' children, Blanquer stood firmly against the neo-colonialist ideology that corrodes universities, nudges French citizens of migrant descent to loath the country where their parents or grand-parents were born, and ultimately undermines French national cohesion. In other words, Blanquer was *la République's* main bulwark against Islamo-leftism, precisely the new trend in French politics Macron hopes to seduce for electoral victories.

Hence the question: whose head will lie on the silver plate this time to enable Macron's next political back flip? What sacred cow should he sacrifice to accomplish his woke U-turn? Blanquer's, obviously, and to do things properly, why not nominate his antithesis in the same position?

No sooner said than done, Macron appointed (to the dismay of many) Pap Ndiaye, an historian of Senegalese descent firm believer in 'systemic racism,' micro racial aggressions, and the need for Western repentance.

Before simply writing off Ndiaye's ideas, it might be worth asking what happened in his life that led him to believe so firmly in these ideas. Perhaps his experience could help us to see that, in fact, there is systemic racism that prevents racial minorities from rising the ranks.

So, has he suffered from clear discrimination for his race as he has attempted to rise through the ranks of power? Quite the contrary. Born to a Senegalese father (the first Subsaharian ever to earn a degree from the prestigious engineering school of *Ponts et Chaussées*) and a French mother, Pap Ndiaye is a pure product of French meritocracy, a

living denial of the structural racism he now professes.

Raised by his mother (his father abandoned the household when he was three), the bright student climbed every step of the social ladder until he earned a Ph.D. and became tenured at the EHESS, one of France's top schools in social sciences, which has in recent years become a hotbed of woke ideology. In 1991, he obtained a scholarship to write his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia. There, he became acquainted with critical race theory and was even invited to his first 'black only' assembly. At first shocked by this practice and its clear contradiction of French universalism, Ndiaye slowly developed an interest in critical race theory and identity politics.

After returning to France, he became involved in black associations and rose in prominence as a vocal advocate of the idea that France is a systemically racist country that relies on police brutality to keep minorities in check. In 2008, he published *The Black Condition: An Essay on a French Minority*, in which he communicated the dogmas of critical race theory to French readers. In 2021, he co-drafted a report on the lack of diversity in the Paris Opera house and recommended concrete measures to increase it, including the repertoire and the race of the dancers.

As he put it, Ndiaye is a "late black." He grew up unaware of discriminations and prospered in a society that he suddenly perceived as racist after his stay in an American campus. The question we must put to this kind of story of self-discovery is a simple one: Why are you so sure this is an example of awakening, and not one of indoctrination? It remains paradoxical for Ndiaye to play the racial victim, albeit a chic and polite one when his social ascension is the paradigmatic example of French universalism and attachment to equal opportunities.

Ndiaye's appointment is much more than a rebuke of Blanquer's legacy or a cynical political move. It looks more like a frontal attack on the two pillars of the French education system, colour-blind meritocracy and universalism. Even worse, introducing critical race theory into the French educational system would throw oil on the fire of racial identities,

potentially intensely corroding French social trust.

In a country where enforcing one minute of silence in classrooms after terrorist attacks remains a headache, where some teachers no longer dare to teach the Shoah, and where hundreds of thousands of pupils literally hate their nation, what is the point of introducing the narrative of oppressed and oppressors according to the pigmentation of the skin? To play the pyromaniac firefighter?

For five years, Macron's "*en même temps*" enabled him to walk on the wire of ambiguity on thorny topics like "*laïcité*," integration of French Muslims, and the rampant influence of cancel culture in academia. For five years, Blanquer was Macron's best alibi to pretend he was working to rescue '*l'école de la République*' from its systemic decadence. Pap Ndiaye's appointment marks the end of this appearance and may well show Macron's real intentions.

One may wonder if this is merely a political move that will be undone once Macron secures a majority in the Assembly, but this is nothing more than wishful thinking. Like most Western countries, and despite Marine le Pen's misleading score, France is irremediably leaning to the (woke, urban, Brahmin) Left. Fatally, so is Macron.

Just when France embarrassed itself in front of the world with the calamitous organisation of the Champions League final and the pathetic denial that the troubles were overwhelmingly caused by local mobs, Macron's U-turn on education sends a very worrying sign. By sacking one of his best generals and replacing him with a *woke chic* scholar when the country is already suffering from racial tensions, the newly re-elected President gives the unsettling impression that France's decadence is a settled issue. From citizenship to race, from universalism to tribalism? There is a *je ne sais quoi* in France that seems to turn the worst possible intuitions into tangible realities.