

The Case of the Dishonorable Roland Dumas

To offend one group of people may be regarded as carelessness; to offend two at the same time looks like self-inflicted misfortune. The 92 year-old French Socialist politician and lawyer, Roland Dumas, managed to offend two groups on February 16, 2015 when he accused Prime Minister Manuel Valls of being under the influence of his wife, Anne Gravoin, a Jewish concert violinist.

Feminists in France as elsewhere should be deeply offended by this disparagement of women, though they have not yet protested against the chauvinistic and unbecoming remark. Dumas insulted a gifted French woman who happened to be Jewish. Equally troubling is the evident implication of anti-Semitism, even if stated in an unctuous fashion.

The repugnant remark of Dumas comes at a moment when there is an increase of anti-Semitism, expressed verbally and by hostile action, in European countries, particularly in France where anti-Semitic actions doubled in 2014 compared with 2013. Most disconcerting is that Dumas' remark came after the murder of Jews in Paris and in Copenhagen, and despite the news of the desecration of more than 300 Jewish graves in Sarre-Union in Eastern France.

Dumas' remark, whether delivered deliberately or thoughtlessly, reignited the controversy caused by the contention of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that, because of the violence against European Jews, they should leave Europe and move to Israel. This proposal has been strongly opposed by Prime Minister Valls. This is particularly important since Valls has been the most eloquent and passionate European politician speaking about the evil of anti-Semitism, that must be ended, since the Islamist murder

of four Jews in the Paris kosher deli.

Dumas was not the first to assert that Valls was under Jewish influence. It had been made earlier by the French-born football player Nicolas Anelka who subsequently apologized. But the new incident concerned a former major player in the political arena. Roland Dumas, a politician close to and a confidant of François Mitterrand, had been French foreign minister 1984-86, and again 1988-93, and President of the Constitutional Council, the highest constitutional authority in France, from 1995 until his resignation in January 1999 because of the Elf Aquitaine scandal in which he was involved.

Prime Minister Valls did not reply to Dumas but he did refer to him as “a man with a known past,” and as a person whose previous remarks had done no credit to the Republic for a long time. That past included some unsavory activities as well as some positive ones such as acting as a lawyer for a time for Matisse and Picasso and helping return the latter’s painting Guernica to Spain.

Valls was correct. Dumas was involved in various dubious and sordid activities. In May 2007 Dumas was found guilty and given a prison sentence that was suspended, for misappropriating funds when he was executor of the will of Alberto Giacometti.

Another disgraceful episode for which this successful lawyer and politician was convicted concerned his earlier involvement in the political and corporate scandal concerning the giant oil company Elf Aquitaine in 2003. The scandal uncovered a web of corruption involving French politicians and business leaders. Dumas was charged with and convicted, though later acquitted on appeal, among other things for his approval, after his opposition, of the sale of French frigates to Taiwan, abetting the misappropriation of company assets, and accepting gifts, including very expensive and exclusive Italian shoes (which are washed in champagne every year),

antique statues, and expensive lunches from his mistress who was paid by Elf. His mistress, a lingerie model named Christine Deviers-Joncour, later told her side of the story in her autobiography, *The Whore of the Republic*.

In his book, *L' épreuve, les preuves*, (The Ordeal and the Evidence) published after the Elf Affair, Dumas criticized the public prosecutor, who then sued him. Dumas was convicted by the Paris Court of Appeal and by the Court of Cassation, but the conviction was overturned in July 2010, by a vote of 5 to 3, by the European Court of Human Rights, That Court ruled that the conviction infringed Dumas' freedom of expression.

More surprising in light of his success as a lawyer and politician is Dumas' lack of political judgment including an obsession with and belief in conspiracy theories. He thought the U.S. official report of the Islamist terror attacks on 9/11 was not to be taken seriously; he did not believe a plane had crashed into the Pentagon. He "knew," as others did not, that Israel was behind the readiness of Britain to strike against Syria in 2013. It must have surprised the French to learn from him that Israel controlled French intelligence services.

In May 2011 Dumas visited Libya in his capacity as a lawyer on behalf of "victims" of NATO bombings in that country, and declared he would defend Muammar Gaddafi if he were brought to trial before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. He was troubled, not by the bizarre Libyan dictator, but by NATO's "brutal aggression against a sovereign country, a UN member." Dumas refused to answer whether he was being paid by Gaddafi. In this trip he was accompanied by his fellow lawyer Jacques Verges, the defender of the brutal Nazi Klaus Barbie, who announced he was going to "unmask those assassins," apparently Americans, not Nazis or Islamist terrorists.

The French Socialist Party immediately condemned Dumas for his

anti-Semitic remark, saying his conduct was unworthy of a Socialist who had been decorated by the Republic. Indeed, Dumas had been appointed a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor. His dishonorable conduct suggests it would be fitting if he were stripped of this honor.

Removing individuals from membership of the Legion of Honor has happened a number of times in the post-World War II period. The brave Communist resister against the Nazis Georges Guingouin was temporarily deprived of the rank because, after false accusations by fellow Communists, he was arrested on Christmas Eve 1953 for crimes allegedly committed at the liberation of France in 1945. Paradoxically, he was defended by Dumas. After an incident of drunk driving in 1998 the actor Gérard Depardieu offered to resign from the Legion; it is not clear whether he did so when he sobered up.

In 1999 Maurice Papon was stripped of the honor. He had been convicted of complicity in Nazi crimes against humanity during the Nazi occupation in World War II. While a senior official in the Bordeaux prefecture at that time, Papon had participated in the deportation of 1600 Jews to their deaths in Nazi camps.

The Spanish-British designer, John Galliano, who was given the award in 2009 by the then President Nicholas Sarkozy for services to haute couture, was stripped of it in August 2012 as a result of anti-Semitic remarks and his praise of Adolf Hitler expressed during a drunken episode. Sadly, Lance Armstrong, who had been made a Chevalier in 2005 after his seventh consecutive Tour de France victory, lost it for his use of performance-enhancing drugs.

The French Legion of Honor is France's highest decoration, officially given for "eminent merit" or excellent conduct in civil or military life. It would be dishonoring the principle of the honor if Dumas were allowed to keep it. Members of the Legion convicted of felony are automatically dismissed from

the order. Members convicted of a misdemeanor (délit) can be dismissed. Though Dumas has not been convicted in a court of law he ought to be convicted by all reasonable people in the court of public opinion. He should be stripped of the decoration. Such an act would be one important indication that France is wholeheartedly involved in ending the spread of the virus of anti-Semitism in the country.

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