

Move to Raid News Site Prompts Outcry in France

By AURELIEN BREEDEN

PARIS — French journalists and press advocates expressed outrage this week after prosecutors tried to search the offices of the investigative news site Mediapart, which had published audio recordings of a former aide to President Emmanuel Macron whose legal troubles have dogged him for months.

The outcry over possible executive overreach grew following reports that information from the prime minister's office had pushed the Paris prosecutor to open the inquiry that prompted the search.

"This investigation is nothing else than a hunt for our sources which aims to prevent us from seeking and finding the truth," said Fabrice Arfi, who leads Mediapart's investigations department.

When two prosecutors and three police officers arrived Monday morning to search Mediapart's offices in Paris, they were turned away. The news site was not legally obliged to submit to the search linked to the disgraced former aide, Alexandre Benalla, because of the preliminary nature of the investigation into a possible violation of privacy and the illegal possession of wiretapping devices.

Still, French journalists and their supporters saw the move as new proof of the adversarial stance toward the media of Mr. Macron, who recently faced pushback after deciding to move the press room outside of the Élysée Palace, the seat of the presidency.

Journalists at dozens of publications issued a statement this week expressing "solidarity with our colleagues" at Mediapart. The National Union of Journalists — referring to the attempted raid and

Juliette Hirsch contributed reporting.

to laws passed this year on the protection of trade secrets and on so-called fake news — described it as worrying that "journalists' duty to inform can be flouted in this way, in France, in 2019."

The episode was the latest of many tied to Mr. Benalla, who was fired last summer as a security aide to Mr. Macron after it was revealed he had hit a protester at a May 1 demonstration.

Once billed the most serious threat to Mr. Macron, the Benalla affair died down and was eclipsed in France's news cycle by the "Yellow Vest" economic protests against the president — until a steady stream of news reports in recent weeks raised questions about how the Élysée had handled the earlier case, and whether Mr. Benalla had used his ties to the presidency to obtain business contracts.

In the audio recordings, which date to July and which Mediapart published last week as part of a wider investigation, Mr. Benalla can be heard discussing the case against him with Vincent Crase, who had also worked on security for the Élysée and for Mr. Macron's party, and who is being investigated over accusations similar to those against Mr. Benalla.

"Crazy thing, yesterday evening the boss sent me a message; he says to me: 'You'll eat them alive. You're stronger than them, that's why I had you beside me,'" Mr. Benalla is heard saying, referring to Mr. Macron, who was still publicly supportive at the time.

Mr. Crase and Mr. Benalla were under legal orders not to see each other because of the investigations, and they could face repercussions for the meeting.

Each revelation about Mr. Benalla has sprouted another, leading to a complex entanglement of legal inquiries around him. He is also facing investigations into his



PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The Mediapart journalist Fabrice Arfi, at the microphones, and his colleague Edwy Plenel, third from right, at a news conference in Paris on Monday defending their investigative news site.

continued use of a diplomatic passport after he was fired and his involvement, while still working at the Élysée, in the negotiation of a security contract between a company owned by Mr. Crase and a Russian oligarch with ties to President Vladimir V. Putin.

Edouard Philippe, France's prime minister, confirmed Thursday in an interview with the newspaper Paris-Normandie that his office had informed Rémy Heitz, the Paris prosecutor, about suggestions from journalists that the recordings Mediapart published might have been taped at the home of Mr. Philippe's head of security.

But Mr. Philippe said in the interview that the only goal had been to share potentially useful information in the cases against Mr. Benalla, not prompt a separate inquiry into Mediapart.

"No instructions were given to the prosecutor's office," Mr. Philippe said. "We never do on individual cases."

Mr. Heitz's office did not respond to requests for comment on Friday. Mr. Macron's office declined to comment, citing the con-

tinuing investigations. His government has rejected accusations it had a hand in the attempted search of Mediapart's offices.

Delphine Meillet, a lawyer in Paris who specializes in press law, said police raids on the offices of news outlets were "extremely rare" in France, with only a handful of cases in the past few decades. Journalists have a legal right not to reveal their sources.

But Ms. Meillet noted that French prosecutors are not independent. They answer to their hierarchy, the Justice Ministry and, as a result, to the executive. Mr. Macron was much more closely involved in the nomination of the Paris prosecutor than his predecessor, François Hollande.

Mediapart, an online, subscription-based publication, has garnered a reputation in France for hard-hitting investigations of politicians and other officials, with direct consequences, including the downfall of a budget minister and the opening of an investigation into possible Libyan financing of former President Nicolas Sarkozy's campaign.

The company's publisher, Edwy

Plenel, said at a news conference after Monday's attempted search that Mediapart was "violating the privacy of no one" and that it was "publishing information in the public interest."

Mr. Macron's political opponents seized on the case as proof of his monarchical leadership and lack of appetite for dissent.

"Intimidations against the press, a law that restricts the right to demonstrate, police violence, antimigrant policies — each day the current administration is shrinking bit by bit the space for fundamental rights in France," Benoît Hamon, who ran against Mr. Macron as a Socialist in the 2017 presidential elections, said on Twitter.

Mr. Arfi, the Mediapart journalist, said Mr. Macron "hasn't gotten to the point of calling us 'enemy of the people,' but he says we no longer seek the truth," referring to his criticism of the news media last year, after the accusations against Mr. Benalla were first reported.

Mr. Macron, Mr. Arfi said, "is developing a very worrying contempt for journalism."

Quebec City Mosque Gunman Gets Life, With No Parole for 40 Years

By DAN BILEFSKY

Alexandre Bissonnette, a 29-year-old former politics student fixated on President Trump, the far right and Muslims, was sentenced on Friday to life in prison without the possibility of parole for 40 years for shooting six people dead in an attack on a mosque in Quebec City in January 2017.

During the attack, Mr. Bissonnette shot several worshippers in the head. Nineteen people were injured, including one who was paralyzed for life.

Under Canadian law, Mr. Bissonnette could have gone to prison for 150 years — or 25 years for each of the six deaths. While underscoring the brutality of the attack, Justice François Huot of Quebec Superior Court suggested that such a harsh sentence would be excessive by denying the defendant the hope of ever leaving prison.

But Muslim leaders, including the mosque's president, Mohamed Labidi, said they were deeply disappointed by Justice Huot's sentence, saying it did not do justice to a horrific crime.

"This rampage left children without parents, destroyed lives, and this man can be free after 40 years?" he asked with incredulity. "We are very disheartened and upset."

Justice Huot announced the sentence after a hearing of more than five hours, during which he gave a minute-by-minute account of the rampage, which he said was "premeditated, gratuitous and abject" and motivated by "visceral hatred toward Muslims."

Several family members of victims sobbed.

Legal scholars said his decision was likely to be challenged on appeal and could end up before Canada's Supreme Court. And once there, they said, it could become a

seminal test of the constitutionality of consecutive life sentences.

Justice Huot discussed the 2011 Canadian criminal law, introduced by the previous Conservative government, that allows a judge to give sentences in 25-year increments in cases of multiple murders.

He said that a 25-year sentence was not severe enough in this case, given the severity of the crime, but that 50 years or more would be excessive.

In what legal scholars called an "extremely complex judgment," Justice Huot parsed his decision by sentencing Mr. Bissonnette to life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years on the first five counts of murder, and added 15 years for the sixth count.

Kent Roach, a law professor at the University of Toronto who specializes in criminal law, called the judgment "innovative" and said it was likely to be challenged.

Noting the case of Bruce McArthur, who was convicted of killing eight men associated with Toronto's gay community and sentenced on Friday to life with no chance of parole for 25 years, Professor Roach said the sentences suggested that Canadian courts had a less punitive culture than the United States.

"Both judgments reflect that Canadian judges are reluctant to give crushing sentences even for the most heinous crimes and resist inflexible sentencing laws," he said.

"In the U.S. there is a longer history of legislatures imposing mandatory sentences that limit judicial discretion," he added. "In Canada, there is more of a focus on rehabilitation."

He noted that Justice Huot appeared to have taken into account Mr. Bissonnette's mental state.

Canada's Supreme Court has in recent years overturned "tough



MATHIEU BELANGER/REUTERS

Alexandre Bissonnette in 2017. He killed six people and injured 19 others in a shooting rampage at mosque in Quebec City.

on crime" legislation introduced by the previous Conservative government, including mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses and mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes.

Prosecutors had argued that six consecutive 25-year jail sentences for each of the six first-degree murder charges befitted the heinousness of the crime, which they called both "violent" and "racist." Mr. Bissonnette pleaded guilty last year to the charges.

In an interview before the sentence was handed down, Irwin Cotler, a prominent international human rights lawyer who served as Canadian justice minister and attorney general, noted that the judge would have to consider the egregiousness of the crime as well as Mr. Bissonnette's mental state. "Sentencing in cases of multiple murders are supposed to bear in mind the principles of retribution and denunciation," he said.

Referring to the sentence the prosecution wanted, he added, "You could argue that 150 years is

tantamount to a death sentence and we abolished capital punishment."

In recent years, several judges have handed out 75-year sentences, including in the case of Justin Bourque, who killed three Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in a rampage in 2014.

The sentence comes amid a raucous debate in Quebec after the province's premier, François Legault, drew opprobrium from Muslim leaders last month for contending that Islamophobia wasn't a problem in Quebec.

His office later qualified that he did not mean Islamophobia didn't exist, but, rather, that it wasn't systemic in the province.

Still, his remarks — two days after the second anniversary of the mosque attack — were greeted with anger by survivors, including Aymen Derbali, who was hit with seven bullets and paralyzed from the waist down after trying to distract Mr. Bissonnette during the rampage.

"There is Islamophobia — the

proof is what happened at the mosque," he told reporters at a ceremony last month, where he was being honored for his bravery.

During a sentencing hearing that lasted for several weeks last year, the prosecution argued that Mr. Bissonnette had killed in a premeditated fashion and approached his victims with a cold-blooded ruthlessness that merited the toughest sentence allowed.

The court heard that Mr. Bissonnette was a socially marginalized young man who had become enthralled by far-right websites and obsessed by serial killers, Muslims and Mr. Trump's tweets.

In the month before the attack, he surfed the internet 819 times for posts related to Mr. Trump, including the American president's travel ban on several Muslim-majority countries.

Mr. Bissonnette had targeted the mosque just hours after he learned of a tweet by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau welcoming refugees to Canada who were being spurned by Mr. Trump.

But the defense presented a contrasting narrative of Mr. Bissonnette, describing him as a slight young man who had been mercilessly bullied at school. The defense suggested that society had failed him and that he deserved empathy and the chance for rehabilitation.

His defense lawyer, Charles-Olivier Gosselin, told the court that Mr. Bissonnette suffered from chronic psychiatric problems, and did not fit the violent profile of a serial killer for whom consecutive sentences were appropriate.

Mr. Gosselin had proposed a life sentence with the possibility of parole after 25 years. Mr. Bissonnette, he argued, had showed signs of remorse, had cooperated with the police and had surrendered after the attack.

Trump Defies Deadline For Report On Khashoggi

By PETER BAKER and ERIC SCHMITT

WASHINGTON — President Trump refused to provide Congress a report on Friday determining who killed the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, defying a demand by lawmakers intent on establishing whether the crown prince of Saudi Arabia was behind the grisly assassination.

Mr. Trump effectively bypassed a deadline set by law as his administration argued that Congress could not impose its will on the president. Critics charged that he was seeking to cover up Saudi complicity in the death of Mr. Khashoggi, an American resident and a columnist for The Washington Post.

"Consistent with the previous administration's position and the constitutional separation of powers, the president maintains his discretion to decline to act on congressional committee requests when appropriate," the Trump administration said in a statement. The statement said the administration had taken action against the killers and would consult with Congress.

But Democrats said Mr. Trump was violating a law known as the Magnitsky Act. It required him to respond 120 days after a request submitted in the fall by committee leaders — including Senator Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee and then the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — a period that expired Friday.

"The law is clear," said Juan Pachón, a spokesman for Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey, the ranking Democrat on the committee. "It requires a determination and report in response to the letter we sent with Corker. The president has no discretion here. He's either complying with the law or breaking it."

The Trump administration imposed sanctions in November



SARAH SILBINGER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

By law, President Trump was supposed to have responded to Congress before Friday.

against 17 Saudis accused of being involved in the killing, but has refused to blame Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a key ally and the country's de facto ruler, despite a C.I.A. conclusion that the crown prince ordered it.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent letters to the committee leaders describing actions taken against individuals without offering the determination of who was responsible as demanded by the lawmakers.

"I anticipate a more detailed briefing from the administration on this issue and look forward to working with them and the members of my committee in our ongoing effort to address the killing of Jamal Khashoggi," said Senator Jim Risch, Republican of Idaho, who succeeded Mr. Corker as chairman.

The Saudi government on Friday rebutted a report that Prince Mohammed told a top aide in 2017 that he would use "a bullet" on Mr. Khashoggi if he did not return to the kingdom and cease his criticism of the Saudi government.

"We know that the crown prince did not order this," Adel al-Jubeir, the minister of state for foreign affairs, told reporters at the Saudi Embassy in Washington. "We know that this was a rogue operation."

"It's like saying when Oliver North was engaged in Iran-contra, did Ronald Reagan know?" he said.

On Thursday, The New York Times reported that the conversation between the crown prince and a top aide, intercepted by American intelligence agencies, revealed the most detailed evidence to date that Prince Mohammed considered killing Mr. Khashoggi long before a team of Saudi operatives strangled him inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul and dismembered his body using a bone saw.

The Saudi government has repeatedly denied that the crown prince played any role. Mr. al-Jubeir said Saudi authorities continue their investigation while a trial of suspects is underway. "Those responsible will be held accountable," he said.

Catie Edmondson contributed reporting.

Serial Killer Gets Life Sentence in Case That Terrorized Gay Men in Toronto

By IAN AUSTEN

OTTAWA — Bruce McArthur, who pleaded guilty to eight murders that brought fear to Toronto's gay community, was sentenced Friday to life with no chance of parole for 25 years.

But as his court case came to a close, the motivation of Mr. McArthur, a 67-year-old landscaper, remained unknown.

In Canada, a first-degree murder conviction brings an automatic sentence of life in prison with no chance of parole for 25 years. The only question before Justice John McMahon of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice was whether to invoke a relatively recent law that extends the period for a parole hearing by allowing consecutive sentences.

Justice McMahon said in court on Friday that if Mr. McArthur had been younger the judge would have accepted prosecutors' recommendation to extend the period before a parole hearing to 50 years. But he added that even if

Mr. McArthur sought parole at 91, the chances of his receiving it would be "very remote at best."

The decision on Friday followed hearings earlier this week in which prosecutors laid out details about the crimes committed by Mr. McArthur, who dismembered his victims and buried their remains in a planter belonging to one of his clients, as well as in a ravine behind the client's house.

Because many of the facts presented at the hearing were so lurid, prosecutors cautioned people against remaining in court to hear them.

At the outset, prosecutors took the unusual step of acknowledging that the authorities had brushed off concerns from gay Toronto residents that they were being stalked by a serial killer.

"For years members of the L.G.B.T.Q. community in Toronto believed they were being targeted by a killer," Michael Cantlon, a prosecutor, told the court. "They were right."

Mr. McArthur's string of mur-

ders has prompted an inquiry by a retired judge into how the Toronto police handle missing persons cases and whether their investigations are influenced by the sexuality or race of those who have vanished.

In November 2012, the Toronto police began an investigation into the disappearances of three men who, it eventually emerged, were murdered by Mr. McArthur. But the inquiry was shut down after 18 months.

Mr. McArthur, who was convicted of assaulting a man with a pipe in 2003, was arrested in 2016.

A man said that Mr. McArthur had tried to choke him in the back of his van but that he escaped. The police, at that time, accepted Mr. McArthur's story that they were engaging in consensual sex.

A Toronto police officer is facing disciplinary charges over his involvement in that arrest and release.

Two pieces of evidence finally convinced Mr. McArthur to the killings when the police renewed

their investigation in August 2017.

Andrew Kinsman, his final victim, had written "Bruce" in a calendar on the date of his disappearance. The police then found surveillance video of someone who appeared to be Mr. Kinsman getting into a red Dodge minivan that day.

The video did not capture the minivan's license plate. But once the police identified it as a 2004 model, a search of Ontario's license records showed that there were only five such red vans registered to men named Bruce. Mr. McArthur was the only one who had been in contact with the force.

The court heard that Mr. McArthur carefully planned his killings. On his computer, investigators found file folders for his eight victims containing photographs of each of them. Many of the photos were taken after their deaths, with the bodies of six of them posed with a fur coat and props.

A ninth folder contained images of a man the police found when they came to arrest Mr. McArthur