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Paris killings

# Charlie Hebdo: Imperialism's new 9/11?

- Debate - Paris, Brussels, responding to the attacks -

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**The Jan. 7 Paris bombings and shootings afforded French and allied capitalist heads of state—some 50 presidents and prime ministers plus top U.S. officials, all complicit with mass murder—the opportunity for an unprecedented show of unity under the call of “I am Charlie Hebdo.” We note the hypocrisy of the perpetrators of war and systematic violence coming together to pose as defenders of “free speech, liberty, fraternity, and democratic rights.” Virtually all have led in suppressing, if not murdering, opposition currents in their own nations and everywhere on earth where their troops engage in the ruthless murder of oppressed people.**

A recent article by Parisian journalist George Kazolias, subtitled, “The Wages of Intolerance,” captured the grotesque hypocrisy of those who led the Sunday, Jan. 11 government-sponsored and media-promoted Paris spectacle of 1.6 million people. “Then there were the world leaders,” Kazolias writes, “Ukrainian Prime Minister, Arsenily Yatsenyuk, who has neo-Nazis in his government and has done nothing to bring to justice the fascists and their police accomplices who murdered 48 ethnic Russians in Odessa last May.

“There was Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban, who has taken numerous measures to muzzle the opposition press, earning the scorn of Reporters without Borders, which ranks his country 64th in press freedom.” Orban has also earned international criticism for encouraging persecution of the Roma people and for his party's anti-Jewish stance.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government slaughtered over 2000 Palestinians last year in its invasion of Gaza, also marched in Paris. While in France, Netanyahu called on French Jews to migrate to Zionist Israel for their “protection.” What hypocrisy! Kazolias, in his article, recalls that noted Israeli historian Shlomo Sand has written, “I am aware of living in one of the most racist societies in the Western world.”

Beating the war drums loudly, the president of the Council of Jewish Institutions in France, Roger Cukierman, declared the attacks in Paris to be the beginning of “World War Three” and likened them to what is happening in “Syria and Gaza.” Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy went further, proclaiming, “War has been declared on France.” Le Figaro's editorial writer, Ivan Rioufol, joined the chorus with “France is at war. Perhaps at civil war tomorrow. Its enemy is radical Islam, political Islam, Jihadi Islam.”

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu joined in the arm-in-arm display of ruling-class solidarity. There was no mention of his government's decades of trampling on freedom of expression, not to mention its ongoing subjugation and war against Turkey's oppressed Kurdish masses, including during recent months when the Turkish government gleefully stood aside watching the Islamic State try to wipe the canton of Kobanî and its Kurdish workers off the face of the earth.

While President Obama did not attend the rally, Jane Hartley, U.S. ambassador to France, was present, while a day earlier, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder attended a “security summit meeting” bringing together top intelligence and law enforcement officials from Europe and North America to discuss how to implement measures to stop terrorism. Holder announced that the White house would convene a Feb. 18 international forum “to prevent violent extremists and their supporters from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring individuals or groups in the United States and abroad to commit acts of violence.”

But voices of dissent spoke loud and clear in the U.S. and around the world. “We are NOT Charlie Hebdo!” read the Dec. 15 [statement](#) adopted by the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC).”

"Neither do we condone the bombings and murder of journalists at their headquarters, however much we are repulsed by their racist, chauvinist and hateful Islamophobic caricatures of oppressed people. Neither do we condone the subsequent murders at the Paris Kosher supermarket," the UNAC's statement continues.

"Yes," the UNAC statement continued "...we are for free speech, freedom of expression and democratic rights for all, including the Muslim and antiwar activists who were banned by the French government from street protests in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, or the Muslim women who are banned from wearing the veil. We are for freedom of expression and the right to exist of Muslim Americans, 700,000 of whom have been investigated or interrogated in the U.S. for being Muslim, or the 1.5 million Latino immigrants in the U.S. who are imprisoned, detained and deported, or the entire world's people who are victims of the all-pervasive high-tech surveillance of everyone's personal means of communication by the U.S., France and all other so-called democratic nations."

Using as a pretext for deepening the concerted and worldwide assault on civil liberties and democratic rights and to justify new wars of conquest, the Jan. 7 bombing of the offices of the racist, Islamophobic satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo—where a terrorist attack killed 17 journalists—world imperialism has declared yet another "war on terror." This one includes openly sending U.S. and allied troops to areas of the world, such as Africa, where they have generally operated in a covert manner in the past. The world's real terrorists believe that Charlie Hebdo can be used to legitimize, in the name of fighting terrorism, their plans for theft and conquest.

The French aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle was assigned a week later to head for Iraq to join U.S. fighter planes in bombing that nation to smithereens. The French National Assembly is all but certain to renew its previously "limited" commitment to join the U.S. bombing in Iraq and Syria.

Three thousand French troops have been deployed in Africa to "counter extremist groups in Chad and Mauritania." Thousands more are stationed in other former French colonies like Mali, where in the name of fighting terrorism they organize to install dictators posing as democrats to protect their "interests," and murder all who oppose the essential re-colonization of the African continent now in progress. The now thundered rationalizations to combat terrorism are dutifully employed to demonize all who resist—the same rationales, minus that of the "white man's burden to civilize savages," used in previous centuries to justify colonization, plunder and enslavement.

A massive mobilization of French police was ordered by President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister Marcel Valls. Ten thousand French troops are deployed across the country to "guard vulnerable sites deemed at risk." Jewish schools and synagogues were placed high on the list. The objective is to manufacture a terrifying atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and recrimination. Electronic surveillance has been ramped up to "curb jihadist recruitment in prisons and other crucibles of radicalization."

"The French response," according to The New York Times, "played into an emerging debate across Europe that pits support for civil liberties against the demands of security officials, who site the attack as evidence of an urgent need to introduce stronger powers to monitor suspects."

A month earlier, France witnessed a wave of criticism of U.S. mass surveillance of its citizens and of the all-pervasive horrors that were revealed in Diane Feinstein's \$40 million, 6000-page Senate Intelligence Committee report documenting widespread CIA "illegal" detention and torture. France was among the several nations who condemned as "draconian" the post-9/11 U.S. reactionary measures like the Patriot Act that included deep incursions into basic civil liberties. Today, that rhetoric has vanished. The near instant transformation was achieved using the combined powers of the French state.

## Attacks on French Muslims

We have heard of no measures taken to protect the beleaguered Muslim communities—the “banlieues” that surround Paris, largely populated by impoverished African and Middle Eastern immigrants—where unemployment ranks highest in the nation and social services rank lowest. Unemployment among Muslim youth approaches 40 percent. Close to half of the residents of Muslim communities lack a high school diploma. As in the U.S., police harassment and profiling—“stop and frisk, French style”—are taken for granted.

There has been little mention of the 50 recorded post-Charlie Hebdo fire bombings or of the racist graffiti-tagged and bullet-ridden mosques; such atrocities meant to terrorize the Muslim population are ongoing and proceed with impunity. France's Central Council of Muslims reported 21 shootings that targeted Muslim buildings.

There is little mention of the fact that 60 percent of French prisons are crammed with Muslims or that Muslim women are repeatedly attacked by Islamophobic bigots who tear off their veils (nijab) or even their hijab (traditional clothing). The report of an Islamophobic monster tearing off the veil of a pregnant 21-year-old Muslim woman went largely unnoticed, including the fact that she was thrown to the ground and repeatedly kicked in the stomach, only to lose her unborn child a few hours later in a local hospital. The French police report noted in the diminutive that she was “kicked in the side”! No one has been arrested for this murder! There are no nationwide searches for the racist gunmen and bombers!

There have been some voices of sanity and compassion in the midst of this government-promoted warmongering, hate, and hysteria, as when a French association representing 120 mayors issued a statement warning that Muslim communities were “on edge” in the face of the terror launched against them. The statement pointed to the need to address “economic, social and educational shortfalls” with regard to France's most impoverished, segregated, and oppressed communities.

French revolutionary socialists, like those in the Anti-capitalist and Revolution current of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), have strongly condemned the racist hysteria. Yet under present conditions a massive and united counter-mobilization has proved impossible to organize.

The “liberal-minded” New York Times opines that “nearly everyone agreed the fallout from the Charlie Hebdo attack in France—including a heightened security response by its allies—is a distraction from a larger problem: a sense of increasing economic and social marginalization that many cited as a root cause of young people drifting toward extremism.” The Times neglected to add that the endless imperialist slaughter and wars against Muslim nations around the world are bound to produce not only massive opposition among the oppressed but also rare acts of terror by desperate individuals who envision no other means to avenge imperialism's systematic slaughtering of millions and its reduction of whole nations to starvation.

Long ago, Leon Trotsky sharply counterposed individual acts of terrorism by tiny groups and individuals outraged by imperialism's never-ending wars, torture, and racist rationalizations to the necessity of collective and united struggles against the capitalist system itself. He wrote, “To learn to see all the crimes against humanity, all the indignities to which the human body and spirit are subjected, as the twisted outgrowths and expressions of the existing social system, in order to direct all our energies into a collective struggle against this system—that is the direction in which the burning desire for revenge can find its highest moral satisfaction.”

Tragically, in the absence of collective struggles against the system led by conscious mass revolutionary parties deeply rooted in all the struggles of the oppressed and aimed at challenging capitalist rule, the imperialist war makers will continue to prevail—through conquest and occupation or through the ruination of entire peoples. Under these circumstances, isolated and individual acts of terror will inevitably continue and be used to further fan the flames of hate. As in France, imperialist usurpers will use them to justify their mass terror—that is, unending wars as well the imposition of blanket restrictions on civil liberties for all those who dare to speak out.

We need not search for evidence of the latter. "French Rein in Speech Backing Terror: Recent Law Allows For Rapid Trials and Stiff Prison Sentences," reads a Jan. 16 New York Times headline. Some 100 people are already under investigation for "making or posting comments that support or try to justify terrorism." Two examples were cited by The Times; in one, a 28-year-old man of Tunisian background was sentenced to six months in prison for shouting support for the gunmen involved in the Charlie Hebdo shootings while passing a police station. Another, a drunk driver who hit another car and injured the driver, was sentenced to four years when, under police detention, he praised the same gunmen.

French prosecutors were urged by Minister of Justice Christiane Taubira to fully utilize a November 2015 law to fight and prosecute "words or acts of hatred with utmost vigor." The zeal with which law enforcement has undertaken this mission was shown in Nantes, when a 14-year-old girl was jailed on charges of "apology for terrorism" for uttering the words "bring out the Kalashnikovs" when a bus conductor asked her for her ticket.

One can only wonder whether the words of Charlie Hebdo journalists, or the words of the multitude of journalists from publications throughout France, not to mention the words of the neo-fascist supporters of Marine Le Pen's National Front, will be subjected to the same scrutiny. Bigots, including those of the liberal or libertarian Charlie Hebdo type as well as their right-wing counterparts, rarely mobilize to defend "free speech" other than their own.

Here we note that there was far less than unanimity in Francois Holland's "Socialist Party" with regard to inviting Marine Le Pen to participate in the Paris demonstration. Le Pen's vitriolic hate-mongering Islamophobic tirades against immigrants were largely indistinguishable from Holland's. She used the rebuff to complain that her "mainstream" views were being purposefully excluded. More than a handful agreed, including the New York Times reporter covering the issue, who speculated that her exclusion was perhaps a "political" move aimed at not boosting Le Pen's poll ratings as a future presidential candidate.

The flagging presidential poll numbers of Hollande's Socialist Party were undoubtedly a factor. Le Pen's National Front, which received the largest vote of all parties in the last French general elections to the European Parliament, 27 percent, today ranks first at 30 percent with regard to a future presidential candidacy.

In Germany, where neo-fascist groups are similarly on the rise, thousands mobilized in anti-immigrant rallies in the city of Dresden in the eastern state of Saxony following the Paris mobilization. But they were effectively countered in Dresden by 35,000 who demonstrated soon afterward in solidarity with Germany's immigrant communities, the largest in Europe. They sought to block the racist protest route of Pegida (Patriotic Europeans Against Islamization of the West), Germany's neo-fascist political grouping.

In Munich 20,000 protesters mobilized to block a Pegida rally. Similarly, 30,000 mobilized in Leipzig in a pro-immigrant demonstration to counter an Islamophobic call to the streets. A few hundred participated in the latter.

## Civil-liberties crackdowns in the U.S.

The history of capitalist government bans on free speech—*not to mention its restrictions of freedom of association, free press and the right to assemble to redress grievances*—is pitiful. In the U.S. in recent years a wave of reprisals has been meted out against college professors, including termination, for their public statements opposing Israel's persecution of Palestinians. Students who assemble to protest the massacre of Palestinians and who organize on campus to support BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) against apartheid Israel see their organizations disbanded across the country.

During the McCarthy era witch hunt of the 1950s, and long afterward, government-invoked "national security" was employed to persecute and imprison radicals of every kind, especially members of the Communist Party (CP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In 1941, the central leadership of the SWP was jailed for 18 months under the notorious Smith Act for their socialist ideas alone. A few years later, the Smith Act and other reactionary laws were used against the CP, with wholesale arrests and imprisonment—*again for ideas alone*. The "evidence" against the

prisoners cited activities such as displaying the works of Karl Marx in their public bookstores.

The witch hunt included legally sanctioned and government-enforced mass expulsion of socialists from trade unions and jobs. Loyalty oaths were mandatory in several cities for everyone teaching in public schools. Travel restrictions, blacklisting in the entertainment and media industries, and a multitude of other fundamental infringements of democratic rights were the rule and remained so for decades.

Almost all of these horrors were codified in law and/or decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, including the infamous decision handed down by Felix Frankfurter, wherein the individual liberty "guaranteed" by the U.S. Constitution, was "balanced" against the "national security" interests of the U.S., with disastrous results for the former. The most heinous of all these laws were subsequently ruled unconstitutional, but only with the rise of a massive civil rights and antiwar Vietnam movement, which rendered them impossible to enforce lest they further enrage mass sentiment opposing any government bans on free speech, free association, and freedom to assemble.

Today, the invocation of "national security" is once again used for deep incursions into democratic and human rights. The wholesale surveillance of the entire citizenry—as revealed by Edward Snowden—as well as torture and detention, and even selected murder of American citizens through drone attacks in other countries, are routinely justified by government officials while the courts grant their rubber stamp of approval.

Socialist have always been ardent defenders of free speech and all other democratic rights won in struggle against government efforts to restrict them. We know full well that so-called hate-crime legislation will inevitably be employed to restrict the rights of radicals and socialists to freely organize and protest. We have no illusions that the bigots organized across the country in groups like the Ku Klux Klan, not to mention racist Tea Party fanatics or racist police and elected officials, will be punished. Indeed, capitalism intentionally keeps these rabid organizations in reserve—albeit on a short leash and on the margins of society—until they are needed to stoke the flames of murder, hate, and repression.

When that time arrives, the hate groups will be joined by the full force of capitalism's increasingly militarized police and other repressive forces. Armed with the "legal" weapons that are today being systematically put into place, U.S. capitalism must resort to repression of a magnitude never before seen in this country as its only "solution" to the rise of mass working-class resistance. We expect that such resistance will arise since U.S. capitalism, which is enveloped by crisis, has no alternative to its present course of steadily imposing austerity measures against workers and all oppressed people.

Only the united and conscious mobilization of the hundreds of millions of capitalism's victims, in the U.S. and worldwide, can pose a serious alternative—an alternative aimed at ending the system's inherent need to oppress and exploit in the interests of the ruling-class "one percent." The rule of the 99 percent—in which the working class in all its manifestations, in all its nationalities and racial groupings, rules democratically and through its own institutions—can open the door to a bright new society, a socialist USA.

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