



Paris, Brussels, responding to the attacks

The March 22 attacks and their shadows

11 June 2016, by **Mauro Gasparini**

Since then, the military has colonized the streets of the Belgian capital as well as those of other large cities such as Antwerp. The whole world was also aware of the role played by Belgium for several authors and suspects of terrorist attacks in recent years in Europe. And those who were closely following international news knew that since November 13, 2015, attacks claimed by Daesh had multiplied from Turkey to Iraq, passing by Tunisia, Libya or Egypt.

The attacks in Brussels came with perfect timing to relaunch the widespread feeling of fear in the city, just a few days after the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, one of the main suspects of the attacks in Paris. An arrest which was glorified by the Liberal Prime Minister Charles Michel and the Minister of the Interior Jan Jambon (N-VA, Flemish nationalists), in a selfie with soldiers. If new evidence was needed that the “terrorism” strategy pursued by the Belgian Government has been a failure, then March 22 has provided it in a manner both tragic and spectacular. The soldiers present at Zaventem and in the subway were unable to do anything to prevent the attacks. The security show orchestrated by the Liberal-nationalist coalition has resulted in a dramatic fiasco.

Something rotten in the state of Belgium...

So why did Daesh choose to hit the airport and the metro in Brussels? The economic impact of the attack on the airport at Zaventem, and the psychological effect of an explosion in the subway in the heart of a European neighbourhood combine with the symbol of Brussels as international city, European and multicultural capital. In addition, Belgium participates in the international coalition against Daesh in Iraq, and it is also the European country most affected, in relation to its population, by departures to Syria: more than 500 Belgians have left, mostly to join Daesh, though some have joined Al Nusra (Al Qaeda).

The reasons for these departures are multiple and complex, of course, and Belgium is far from being the only country affected. But like its neighbours, it provides a fertile ground for the growth of these sectarian gangs. The physical distance between the rich and the poor, or between whites and ethnic minorities, is much less in Brussels than in the large French cities. But the descendants of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants, who arrived in the 1960s as a result of bilateral treaties

answering the Belgian bourgeoisie’s need for labour, and which form the major part of the 700,000 Muslims in the country, are suffering racist discrimination and Islamophobia.

Brussels, the most multicultural city in Belgium, is at the same time the economic lung and the poor parent. The figures are eloquent: one inhabitant in five in the region of Brussels is without work, while the official rate for Belgium is 8.5%. One Brussels inhabitant in three is poor. Social selection is rampant in a school system that operates as a market and where Catholic education, funded by the state but under private management, accounts for half the system. The weight of this Catholic pillar is also manifest each year during the national festival when the Prime Minister and King attend the Catholic Te Deum ceremony. This makes even more obvious the purpose of politicians and editorial writers who agitate on “secularism” and in particular the veil, drawing on the Islamophobic obsessions which have had some success among our neighbours: stigmatizing and discriminating against Muslims.

The number of schools where the wearing of the headscarf is still allowed has been reduced to almost zero and the wearing of the niqab was prohibited initially in Molenbeek, at the time led by the Socialist Party. Belgium is one of the European

countries where educational and labour market inequalities are highest. A young Belgian-Moroccan or Belgian-Congolese will be three times less likely to find a job than a youth of Belgian origin. In addition, unlike Paris or other major cities in France where the popular classes are relegated to the periphery, the popular neighbourhoods of Brussels are in the heart of the city: there is only ten minutes walk between Molenbeek and the hipsters of the Dansaert neighbourhood in the centre of the capital. In some of the poorer districts of Brussels, which includes the municipalities of Brussels-City, Schaerbeek, Saint-Josse, Anderlecht, Saint-Gilles and Molenbeek, the unemployment rate among young people is sometimes well over 50%. All of this is in addition to the police harassment suffered by the young people of entire neighbourhoods. Verbal and physical violence against immigrants of Muslim culture has also greatly increased in recent years in the country.

In such a context, it is not surprising that groups such as Daesh and other forces of the extreme-fundamentalist right have managed to recruit a few dozen people and that Molenbeek, far from the clichés, is not the only one affected by the jihadist phenomenon. In fact, it is important to emphasize that the Flemish fiefdom of the N-VA, Antwerp, is the biggest source of Belgian fighters for Daesh, that a terrorist cell was arrested in Verviers in the east of the country in January 2015 and that a number of other communities in and out of Brussels have been cited in various investigations. Also, proportionally, Belgium is the country that has the most combatants in Syria. It has been a place of residence or passage for other perpetrators of attacks such as Mehdi Nemmouche who attacked the Jewish Museum in Brussels or Amedy Coulibaly who bought arms here before committing the attacks against the Hyper Cacher in Paris last January. Finally, two of the perpetrators of the attacks in Paris lived in the Brussels Region.

The jihad phenomenon which the left and social movements must face today is complex. In the context that we have described above, it is generally

not religion which motivates the attraction toward organizations such as Daesh and the passage to the deed. It is rather via the Internet, in particular thanks to a well rehearsed propaganda, or in the street, that they are recruited. There is no typical profile among the perpetrators of the attacks in Europe, either on the social or religious level for example: Abdelhamid Abaaoud, one of the alleged organizers of the attacks in Paris, studied in a fairly prestigious lycée and was not a mosque attendee. Many of these jihadists are in identity crisis, some are in search of glory, or a cause to defend, others still seek redemption or an outlet. Those caught in the inhuman prison system in Belgium or in France - where the majority of inmates are people originating from postcolonial immigration, although crime is not stronger in their communities - are also in the kind of despair that is conducive to recruitment by Islamic fundamentalists.

It is clear that the situation of structural racism in European societies, added to the imperialist wars carried out in the Middle East by both the USA and their European allies, then more recently by Russia, as well as the persistence of the oppression of the Palestinian people, feed the propaganda of organizations such as Daesh. A policy of prevention, of accompaniment and interculturality, in partnership with the local communities, can help, unlike the completely repressive approach implemented for years in Brussels. In all this, the role of anti-capitalist political forces as actors of resistance, but also as representatives of a radical perspective of another society, is paramount. In the short term, the left must avoid the traps set by the attacks and the context that they create.

Collective emotion and political consequences

In Belgium, the attacks in Brussels have not so far benefited the government and the reactionary forces to the extent they had hoped

for. But the situation is not brilliant for the labour movement and the left either. In fact, the essence of the political advantage of the attacks was used by the government last year, in particular after the attacks in Paris. The dream of bringing the army onto the streets, included in the program of the N-VA, was able to materialize. The attacks were then used as a weapon of mass distraction in the face of the austerity policy pursued by the Liberal-nationalist coalition, and provided a golden excuse for the most collaborationist wing of the union bureaucracy, which halted actions against the government.

After March 22, the Place de la Bourse, in the heart of Brussels, was converted into a place of contemplation, of tribute and gathering for the people of the city, bringing together in the image of the victims workers, men and women of different cultures and nationalities, adults, children, young people and pensioners. The representatives of the different faiths, Muslims first, trade union and anti-racist movements, the Hart Boven Hard movement representing Flemish associations and cultural circles opposed to austerity, and its Francophone equivalent Tout autre Chose all condemned the attacks, but also warned against hatred and divisions on the basis of religion that they intended to strengthen in society. If Belgian flags were a little more visible than usual, this did not reflect a national arrogance to which Belgium, a state which has grappled since its creation with the Flemish national question, is no longer accustomed.

For the government, the N-VA was the main source of provocative and racist rhetoric: its president, Bart De Wever, even said he felt "hatred, because these people still receive support from their community". Jan Jambon, Minister of the Interior and a pillar of the N-VA in the government coalition, also made incendiary statements, first comparing the fleeing jihadists to Jews who were in hiding during the Second World War, and then stating that a significant share of Muslims in Belgium had "danced" during the attacks, even going so far as to say that the terrorists "are only a pustule. Below is a cancer which is much more

difficult to treat" (sic), employing a clearly far right vocabulary.

These declarations cannot be disconnected from the post-attacks context in Belgium. On Sunday, March 27, a few days after the attacks, the mayor of Brussels-city and the Minister of the Interior banned a march "against fear and for living together" which was to take place in the Bourse. Despite the fact that the organizers, who were not left wing activists, had agreed to postpone the march, many people still came to gather at the Bourse that day. They ended up faced with a march by Belgian hooligans, among them many activists of the extreme right, which had been able to take place without permission and under police escort. The political purpose of the manoeuvre was to break the symbol of solidarity and of contemplation that the Bourse had become and replace it with an image of racism and aggressive Islamophobia. The social-democratic local authorities of Brussels and Vilvoorde had followed the direction of the N-VA Minister of the Interior and a police commissioner in Brussels, Vandersmissen, renowned for his ultra-authoritarian sympathies and his violent methods against left protesters. The N-VA, in slow but continuous decline in the face of the neo-fascists of the Vlaams Belang (the main party of the extreme right) in Flanders, did not condemn the assault by the hooligans, unlike the other parties represented in Parliament.

A week later, the strong state had again shown its shadow as during the level 4 alert and lockdown last November: while the Metro was still only half operative in the capital, the government authorized 24/7 searches and 200 new soldiers were mobilized in the streets of Brussels. All demonstrations were prohibited during the weekend in the whole of Brussels. but not shopping in the major commercial arteries, of course. The planned assembly at the Bourse against fascism and Islamophobia and in tribute to the victims of the terrorist attacks, which went ahead despite the ban, then experienced violent repression from the same police officers who had protected the fascists and hooligans on March 27. The President of the League of Human

Rights was even arrested "as an example" according to Commissioner Vandersmissen. Once again the message is clear: the forces of repression and the authorities want to stifle any politicization by the left of the attacks.

The extreme right is waiting in ambush: very divided and marginal in the south of the country, although the different formations together account for more than 10% of the votes, it is however very much present in Flanders. It is even virtually hegemonic there as racism has contaminated the political discourse and the media and it is rooted in society. The N-VA has, in rhythm with its electoral rise, welcomed dozens of local elected representatives and activists of the Vlaams Belang. But after a year and a half of governmental erosion for the N-VA, the Vlaams Belang is again rising in the polls. It also directs the Islamophobic movement Pegida Flanders, in collaboration with fascist groupuscules, but without great success: the assemblies gather at most 150 to 300 people and the counter-demonstrators are always three to four times more numerous. The prospects for the far right also depend on the way in which the social movement reacts following the attacks and in the face of the actual penetration of the program of the right, from the presence of the army in the streets to structural discrimination.

The government is also experiencing difficulties. After the incomprehension created by the lockdown of November, the government rhetoric and the army in the streets did not prevent a massacre. The criticism of the management of investigations, or the non-closure of the metro after the explosion at the airport and the failure to take into account important information about one of the suicide bombers have embarrassed the Minister of Justice Koen Geens (Flemish Christian Democrat) and the Minister of the Interior Jambon, whose resignations Charles Michel refused to accept in an attempt to cover for his government. Shortly afterwards, the failure to take into account warnings on airport security resulted in the resignation of the Minister of

Transport, the Liberal Jacqueline Galant, already under challenge for her visible incompetence as she attempted to carry out colossal budget cuts on the railways. A commission of inquiry has been opened on the attacks, from which the PTB, the only radical left force in the Parliaments of the country, has been excluded. The recent statements of Jan Jambon on the Muslims who supposedly "danced" following the attacks have in turn sparked a wave of scandalized reactions from anti-racist milieus but also from the parliamentary opposition, including the social democrats, denouncing the inability of the Minister to provide the slightest evidence of his claims.

And this is not all. The Michel government has quickly had to resume its work of budgetary control, in the midst of the Panama Papers affair. This adjustment has served as a pretext for a train of measures of deregulation of employment of great magnitude including, in particular, the announcement of the end of the standard 38 hour week and the 8 hour day through a generalized annualization of working time. Attacks are also planned against civil service pensions, the long term sick and employment contracts through the establishment of zero hour and temporary contracts.

What response from the labour movement?

The trade union branches of the two big confederations, the FGTB (Socialist) and CSC (Christian) had conducted a credible plan of actions in the autumn of 2014 to combat the first austerity plans and counter-reforms of the right wing-Flemish nationalist government. A wave of demonstrations and strikes had culminated in a massive inter-professional strike day in December 2014. But the movement as stopped in the name of "social dialogue", this system that puts negotiations between trade unions and employers at the centre of the evolution of employment law and social security. In 2015, while it was clear that this so-called

consultation had allowed the government to advance, the trade union movement slid into actions which were of lesser magnitude and more scattered, without perspective. The attacks in Paris, it was said, had served as a pretext to the ultimate disorientation and total retrenchment of trade-union struggles. In the last few weeks, the FGTB has for example not reacted publicly to the violent repression of the Bourse against the left and to police complicity with the extreme right, whereas trade union activists represented a good part of the hundreds arrested.

But rank and file anger at the government's projects remains. The revival of the social movement in France and the Panama Papers feed the hopes of the more combative trade unionists. Also, in the last few weeks, Belgium has experienced a spontaneous strike of air traffic controllers, workers at a steel mill have imprisoned their directors so as to obtain the payment of their wages some Nuits Debout have appeared in several cities. The unions have therefore re-launched actions in dispersed fashion, a strike of some civil servants will take place at the end of April and the possibility of unitary demonstrations of great magnitude or even strikes is evoked.

The main radical left force in Belgium, the PTB, with its 10,000 members and its parliamentarians at federal and regional level, has several advantages in the current situation. It has first succeeded in building a presence in many popular neighbourhoods of Brussels, Antwerp and even Liège, with a strong population of Muslim culture. It also has a strong trade union implantation in the organized bastions of industry and a positive relationship with a number of social movements and citizens like Hart Boven Hard and Tout Autre Chose. Its spokesperson Raoul Hedebouw is very popular in the south of the country for his denunciation of the austerity and

the tax unfairness whose gravity has just been displayed by the Panama Papers.

However, like other left forces in Europe and in the world, the PTB is uncomfortable with the issue of terrorism. Thus, its members abstained on the forfeiture of nationality in July 2015, before making their mea culpa publicly six months later, and sent contradictory messages when the government granted an extra 400 million to the budget against terrorism. Similarly, its calls to frighten hatred and division are often combined with a discourse on national unity.

The approach followed by the PTB wishes to be "pragmatic" and to focus its criticism on the lack of effectiveness of anti-terrorist measures through the defence of a more "targeted" approach. But the social movement and the forces of the radical left have every interest in pointing out and fighting specifically the dangers represented by the strong state, national unity and rampant Islamophobia for all democratic and social rights.

At the international level, the healthy reflex of opposing Belgian participation in the strikes of the coalition in Iraq and Syria and the expenditure of several billion for the purchase of new fighter aircraft in fact represents consensus within the Belgian radical left. However, this reflex is accompanied in the PTB, but also other sectors of the left, by a vision of the Syrian and Middle Eastern situation sympathetic to the reactionary camp made up by Russian imperialism, the Iranian theocracy and the Assad regime. In this perspective, taking large liberties with the facts, the only solution in Syria would be to support Assad as a lesser evil to combat Daesh, the latter being only the product of the intervention of the USA, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The rest of the Syrian opposition, civilian and military, is swept from the table,

as is the proven complicity of the Assad regime in the emergence and growth of Daesh, their common trafficking, their joint operations against the territories controlled by Syrian opposition... and especially, despite the fact that pro-Assad forces are responsible for more than 90% of dead civilians in Syria, by a range of methods just as abominable as those that have made Daesh famous. Thus, sending the message that a few hundred deaths from atrocities in Brussels or Paris have much more importance than those of hundreds of thousands of Syrian (and Iraqi) civilians, most of them Sunni Arabs, does in fact feed the sectarian propaganda of Daesh. All these deaths are however linked: the chaos caused by the counter-revolution in the region, particularly in Syria, cannot spare Europe.

The majority of left currents around the world have probably committed their worst fault of the beginning of this century by refusing to Syrians any political and concrete solidarity, thus ironically echoing the policies carried out in reality by Western imperialism. Since the partial truce in March, Syrians have resumed their dozens of weekly demonstrations to denounce both Assad and Daesh and Al-Nusra. The struggling peoples of the region are the only ones capable of permanently depriving Daesh of its popular base and its territory. Daesh is the rotten fruit of local dictatorships and of neo-colonialism. Both here and there, the terrorist attacks serve the mutual interests of the neoliberal police state and fascistic reactionary forces, and create the risk of a desperate paralysis of the social struggle. It may not be too late to radically change direction. It is up to the popular movements and the forces of the radical left to take up the thread of internationalism and to offer a meaning and a perspective to the rising anger in this degenerate capitalist world. And these tasks are current well beyond Belgium.

On “Jihadist” terror: The radical Left after the Brussels attacks - The silence of the sectarian English-language blogosphere and equivocation of the radical Left in France - What’s the right approach?

5 June 2016, by **Pierre Rousset**

There has been a succession of murderous “Jihadist” terror attacks in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. They have to be grasped as an international phenomenon - but also in relation to each specific national and regional context.

My remarks here concern only Europe since the January 2015 Paris attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and the Hyper-Cacher Jewish supermarket and look at two matters in particular: commentary in the English-language blogosphere and within the radical Left in France.

After the storm, the silence of a significant part of the English-language blogosphere

Following the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, the English-language blogosphere went into overdrive, churning out thousands of e-mails and hundreds of terse articles, furious broadsides and vicious polemics. However, the attacks that occurred shortly thereafter in Denmark (in February 2015) were greeted with silence, as were the full-blown massacres that took place in Paris in November 2015 and in Brussels in March 2016. Odd, don't you think?

Some organizations like the ISO in the US have published a range of articles and eyewitness accounts on the recent massacres [1], and progressive websites such as Open Democracy have provided consistent coverage of events. But other organizations, though while closely following developments in the Middle East, apparently don't see what all the fuss is about.

As for the blogosphere, it has remained indifferent, for the simple reason that it no longer finds the matter stimulating. The big question that gripped it back in January 2015 was not the Islamic State's policy of terror but rather the guilt of its victims - with *Charlie Hebdo* accused of Islamophobia, and of course “the” French and “the” French Left taken to task for their apparently world-famous racism.

In the wake of the recent massacres, can people now recognize that this “approach” was parochial, navel-gazing and obsessed with questions of identity? *Charlie Hebdo* was in no way “responsible” for the January 2015 attacks; it was just a convenient target. There would have been attacks even if the journal had never existed, just as there had been attacks before and there have been attacks since. For some parts of the radical Left, the *Charlie Hebdo* tree was used to hide the Jihadist forest.

This isn't an after-the-fact rationalization. It was already clear at the time. The analysis that François Sabado and I provided in the wake of

the January attacks barely mentioned *Charlie Hebdo* because the journal as such didn't “explain” anything. [2] I subsequently also responded to accusations levied against the journal [3], but whatever one may think of its history and editorial line the real problem lay elsewhere.

A section of the radical Left argued that the Islamic State (and other Jihadist movements) only attacked “understandable symbols”, such as *Charlie Hebdo*, Jews (meant to embody the state of Israel) and churches (symbols of the West's “crusades”). This was not only a complacent but also an utterly illusory reading of the IS's aims (see the article I co-wrote with François Sabado following the November 2015 attacks [4]). The entire, undifferentiated (and even non-European, in an international airport) civilian population is a “legitimate target” in its eyes. [5] The IS approach is indeed to kill, wound and traumatize the largest number of people to stir up tensions among ordinary people.

In Europe, we now live under the constant threat of large-scale terrorist attacks, as was already the case in other regions of the world. No doubt, we must understand the root causes there (wars without end, neoliberalism, dictatorship, to name a few) and here (the growing precariousness of living conditions, the dictatorship of “markets”, discrimination, to name a few) - but we also have to take stock of the consequences. How can we prevent the establishment of regimes based on

an extended state of emergency, as we have seen in France, when there is a succession of such terror attacks? How can we secure a decent welcome for refugees when fear of “terrorists dressed up as Syrian refugees” becomes the norm? How to roll back far-Right forces across Europe when the Islamist far-Right is such a wonderful foil for them (and vice-versa)?

IS policies and its “war aims” now weigh heavily upon the course of events in Europe - for the worse. To avoid becoming hostages of the law-and-order, militarized and repressive response of our rulers, we have to counterpose other methods for fighting Jihadism - and not just in words, but *in deeds* as well.

Different positions in France

ESSF posted four batches of press releases and statements following the Brussels attacks. [6] I'll refer to them by “batch” number. But let's begin with a plea from Belgium (batch 1):

“Why aren't Muslims condemning terrorist attacks en masse?”

Because we're driving the taxis that have been taking the population home for free since yesterday...

Because we're caring for the wounded in hospitals...

Because we're driving the ambulances that are racing through the streets like shooting stars to try to save what life remains in us...

Because we're at the reception desks of the hotels that have been welcoming onlookers for free since yesterday...

Because we're driving the buses, the trams, and the subway cars so that life can continue, though wounded...

Because we're still looking for criminals in our police, investigator, and magistrate outfits...

Because we're crying for our dead, too...

Because we are no more spared than anyone else...

Because we are doubly, triply bruised...

Because the same faith produced the executioner and the victim...

Because we're groggy, lost, and we're trying to understand...

Because we spent the night on our doorstep waiting for a person who won't come back again...

Because we're counting our dead...

Because we're in mourning...

The rest is only silence..."

IsmaËl Saidi, Belgian-Moroccan film and theatre director, author of the play *Djihad* [7].

Back to France. As a general rule, trade unions (batch 2), movements and parties have clearly condemned the massacre, its perpetrators and the repressive and discriminatory measures our governments have taken in response. Some haven't said anything yet (Solidaires, for example), while others have dug themselves into a rigid and tersely defensive position. First prize goes to Alternative Libertaire (AL) which felt it was enough to publish a statement from AL Brussels asserting that it would continue to fight (batch 4, as with the following references). That's pretty meagre in the circumstances!

Other organizations, such as the NPA, strongly condemn the “revolting terror attacks”, declare their solidarity with victims and denounce the terrorists' goals (“to create an irreversible spiral of terror and violence by spreading hatred and fear”). After this first paragraph, though, the following six are completely arrayed against our rulers' domestic and Middle East policies and against “the servants of the banks and multinationals who run the world.” Is our only possible line of action to demand that our governments radically change course?

As for Ensemble! (member organization of the Left Front), it sticks to very general considerations: “It is necessary to provide all the necessary means to ensure public safety and prevent new attacks, and this means providing all the necessary resources to public services and waging a determined fight against inequality and all forms of discrimination - and not rejecting migrants or entrenching a state of emergency that has led to the stigmatization of Muslims and criminalization of social movements.”

For its part, the Left Party (PG) focuses its press release solely on Syria, restating its “pro-Putin” position: “Military support for those countries and forces currently fighting IS on the ground must be provided by an international coalition under the aegis of the UN. For it is in this region of the world, and in accordance with international law, that the IS threat must be eliminated.”

To be fair, these are just short press releases drafted in the heat of the moment. We'll need to wait for more in-depth articles to have a proper discussion. For example, the Belgian LCR-SAP's statement (batch 1) has now been fleshed out with analysis from Daniel Tanuro (one of the organization's leaders). [8] In the meantime, we can observe that *political* condemnation of the Islamic State (and not only of its murderous methods) is now more widespread and better substantiated than before, but that the question of “how to fight Jihadism” is dodged or dealt with in far too general terms.

Between a dreadful present and the glorious future, how do we keep up the fight?

In large measure, the struggles we are already waging are part of the solution. They hit at the social roots of the democratic crisis, aim to build a truly left-wing alternative based on solidarity that breaks us out of the deadly choice between neoliberal hegemony and ideologies of hate, raise the question of peace and security from the point of view of the world's peoples and not of its governments, and much else beyond. Still, aside from the relationship of forces, we run up against real difficulties, such as:

Credibility in the dreadful present.

The “people” is currently unable to banish extreme-Right forces (whether non-denominational or religious) from its midst by means of collective anger and stigmatization, and this is

particularly true in relation to the Jihadist extreme-Right. The police, army and secret services are therefore seen in a positive light or at least as a necessary evil. Recall the heartfelt cry of a victim of the Brussels airport explosions: “Where are those fucking soldiers?!” Fine words are no use in such circumstances, and we would do better to hone in on those instances where our governments’ manipulation of fear can be clearly demonstrated.

Talk of a glorious future is not credible. Of course, resistance needs hopeful future horizons, and we have to put a name on the alternative we propose, but no one believes (least of all ourselves) that we are making large strides toward reaching this hopeful future any time soon.

So how best to fight? Of course, I don’t claim to have a turnkey solution here. I do, however, believe there are important topics for debate, starting with two considerations:

Jihadism – as well as the network of ideologically similar political-religious currents – is not only an imported product or some kind of overhang from the crisis in Iraq and Syria, but also an *internal reality*. This means it has to be fought here and not just over there.

This fight here and over there has to be waged by progressive forces *on their own terms*, in tandem with their resistance to imperialism and dictatorship. This applies to us. It’s not enough to fight Jihadism and other fundamentalist movements *indirectly*, for example by denouncing our own country’s imperialism. We have to fight them *directly*, because they are now part of *our own reality*.

I’ll try to show what I think this might mean.

***Tous ensemble* â€” United we stand**

We have one major asset, especially in France: the brutality and all-encompassing character of neoliberal attacks on democratic freedoms, labour laws, and so forth. That provides a solid objective basis for mounting united resistance.

Of course, this *Tous ensemble*

approach can drown out the specific demands of those facing the greatest exploitation and discrimination, those with neither voice nor power. We have to consciously guard against this danger – but we also have to foster the *Tous ensemble*, as much in struggle as in the day-to-day. As the Union of Progressive Jews (Belgium) has pointed out (batch 3), “We wouldn’t want for city residents hereafter to retreat into their respective corners, distrustfully staring at one another in stony silence. The terror attacks killed indiscriminately. More than ever, we have to develop an approach that creates spaces to meet, dialogue and mix – with the focus on creating awareness of the different narratives that shape our urban adventure in order to turn them into a shared story.”

Tous ensemble requires that our activism include all the demands of the really existing workforce (which increasingly includes the “precariat”) and of all residents in working-class areas, even when this means a break from our usual trade-union and political routines. It’s not enough, for example, to fight police violence in these areas. We also have to take gang violence into account.

Tous ensemble means we have to defend all victims. There can be a tendency to rank solidarity, which in practice means abandoning those victims seen as “non-priority” or who are on the receiving end of attacks from an “oppressed oppressor”. Specifically, we have to defend Jews facing death threats and not only Muslims (or those presumed to be Muslim) facing Islamophobia. We also have to defend “Arab-Muslim” women who refuse to wear the headscarf that conservative Islamists seek to impose on them, and not just covered women physically attacked, insulted and humiliated by “homegrown” racists. We have to fight homophobia wherever it rears its head.

Tous ensemble requires that we fight against all forms of racism, against all forms of xenophobia, against hatred for the Other. Different forms of racism have different histories and moorings, and we should be mindful of this, but no racism is benign. Racism and xenophobia are deadly poisons

which ultimately make struggle in common impossible and provide a wonderful helping hand to the ruling order, which survives thanks only to our divisions.

Tous ensemble requires not only fraternal recognition of the Other and appreciation of “mixing”, but also common struggles for shared rights – the right to a life without precariousness, to education and culture, to employment, to safety, to healthcare and much else besides.

An ideological struggle

There is no standard profile for the person from Europe who goes off to join the Islamic State. Social, geographic and religious (or non-religious) background varies – proving that the phenomenon is the result of a multi-faceted crisis. Of course, the profile of perpetrators of Jihadist violence here in Europe is much narrower. They’ve often been members of gangs and spent time in prison; having already been involved in armed operations, they have the connections required to carry out this kind of action.

Still, we shouldn’t underestimate the ideological factors at play in these processes described by some as a “radicalization of Islam” and by others as an “Islamicization of radicalism” (I find these uses of the word “radical” rather objectionable!). For example, while Salafist currents don’t necessarily lead people to Jihadism, they are extremely reactionary all the same. [9] Generally speaking, we’re seeing the powerful growth of conservative currents (and Muslims don’t have a monopoly on this). All told, this creates fertile ideological ground for the growth of political religious fundamentalism.

We fight Catholic fundamentalism and Evangelical Protestant fundamentalism – both of which are on the extreme Right of the political spectrum – with a rights-based approach: the right to abortion, marriage rights for all, and the right to education based on science (against creationism) and gender equality. The

same should go for the fight against Muslim fundamentalism, which is also politically on the extreme Right.

Conservative thought, and Jihadism in particular, lays special emphasis on the subordination of women. Clearly, the defense of women's rights (as well as gay and lesbian rights) is therefore a battleground of paramount importance for us.

Generally speaking, extreme-Right forces are on the offensive in Europe and wear different identity masks. These are old and new "homegrown" extreme-Right forces, some more clearly fascist than others, and they are in a position to challenge for power — and already influence government — in a range of European countries. This is a huge threat!

But this threat shouldn't make us turn a blind eye to the consequences of the growth of Islamist far-Right forces. They have taken root in working-class areas where a far-Right party such as the Front National (in the case of France) gets no traction. As such, these forces complement each other and represent formidable obstacles to any truly left-wing project of solidarity and emancipation.

No sacrificing their rights (or lives) for our security

We always denounce the way our governments use fear to justify repressive measures at home and war abroad. The problem is that some on the Left take positions that display a lot of cynicism and precious little solidarity. I'll look at two examples.

Buttressing Salafism?

In a *Libération* op-ed piece, the philosopher and sociologist Raphaël Liogier suggests a way to combine (our) freedom with (our) security. [10] In the name of fighting armed Jihadism more effectively, he proposes that we turn to Salafist mosques for support - rather than targeting them as the government has been doing. Salafist circles threatened by IS could

offer authorities "an extensive information network in the heart of the Muslim community".

"Unlike Jihadists," Liogier says, "these fundamentalists are focused on daily life and customs and are completely apolitical." So, no problem then? Our academic takes the imam from the city of Brest, Abou Houdeyfa, as an example of the Salafist mosque representatives with whom we should be working. *Libération* editors remind readers that Abou Houdeyfa preaches that "music gives rise to evil".

It's no accident that, in order to dispel any possible ambiguity, Liogier cites Abou Houdeyfa as an example of whom we could turn to for "support". This imam was at the centre of a scandal when a video excerpt of one of his classes was publicly circulated last September. He is shown telling children that listening to music is forbidden and that "those who enjoy it" risk being "turned into monkeys and pigs" in the hereafter. And that those who listen to music are walking down the devil's path [11].

Can we remain indifferent when such things are being taught to young children? Isn't the criminalization of music an extremely harsh form of social violence — in whatever part of the world one might be? How can it be possible to ignore the wealth of musical cultures in Muslim countries? And what about the status of women? Liogier readily admits the practise of an "extreme fundamentalism of mores, with women wearing the full-length veil, for example," but, never mind, it's just a lifestyle choice. [12] End of story.

Liogier claims to have found a way to combine effective security with democracy. In fact, though, he has a narrow police-type vision of the fight against IS, in whose name the emancipation struggles of an entire segment of our society have to be sacrificed without hesitation. [13] Democracy for whom? Security for whom?

Support Putin and Assad in Syria?

Let's return to the position of the Left Party (PG) in France. In the wake of the Brussels attacks, the party

repeated its basic position on the Syrian conflict (which Jean-Luc Mélenchon has asserted on numerous occasions): support for the Russian intervention and for the Assad regime. The Communist Party of Belgium has aligned itself even more closely with Moscow (batch 3). As mentioned above, the party uses the stilted language of diplomatic communiqués to explain that an international coalition under the aegis of the UN should provide support "to the countries and forces who are currently fighting IS *on the ground*" (batch 4) - with "on the ground" primarily meaning Russia and Syrian government forces.

The Assad regime is largely responsible for the Syrian crisis and for the advances of the Islamic State in Syria. It has tortured, starved and killed more Syrians than any other protagonist in this merciless war. It's true, though, that Assad hasn't dispatched kamikaze commandos to shed blood in Europe. So too bad for victims "over there" of one of the bloodiest dictatorships in the world and of particularly murderous Russian bombing. In the eyes of the PG, upholding (French) statesmanship, France's international stature and the security of our citizens "over here" are well worth a heavy dose of Realpolitik!

Over here and over there

For any approach based on (internationalist) solidarity, active ties between "over here" and "over there" are essential. Here are three ideas to strengthen these ties:

- 1. Cooperate more closely with immigrant organizations** - and especially, in France, with independent organizations of immigrants from North Africa. Between the Paris attacks of January and November 2015, there was the Bardo Museum terrorist attack in Tunis. Though there was a common response of French-Tunisian movements and migrant-support groups on both shores of the Mediterranean [14], human-rights and radical-Left organizations in France were all over the map. Every terror

attack on one side of the Mediterranean or the other could be an occasion for common statements and actions going beyond mere symbolism.

2. Strengthen Syria solidarity work. While the “Neither War nor State of War” coalition does indeed exist, it is focused on the policies of the French government overseas and in France itself. That’s very important, but it doesn’t replace the need for a specific solidarity movement, which is beyond its remit. The coalition calls for the withdrawal of French forces from the theatres of operation where they have been deployed. This is essential *for us*. Still, though such a withdrawal would have a *real impact* in parts of Africa it wouldn’t in Iraq and Syria where French imperialism plays a minor role. As the coalition itself points out in its press release on the Brussels attacks (batch 3), French jets had “only” carried out 680 of the “Western Coalition’s” 11,086 air strikes. So although it would be significant development *here*, French withdrawal wouldn’t change a whole

lot *over there*.

Solidarity with Syria can’t be defined solely in relation to our imperialism and, in vague terms, to the “Western Coalition”. It has to factor in the main protagonists on the ground, which include Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Hezbollah, and even Israel and Egypt, to name a few. There are also numerous fronts and “wars within the war”. Solidarity can’t be organized without knowing to whom support should be provided or refused, and what type of peace package deserves our support. No doubt, the crisis in the Middle East is complicated! But we need basic underlying points of agreement – for example, shared support for the Kurdish resistance and the popular, progressive Arab resistance – and this is just not possible with pro-Assad forces, with those who have a religious-sectarian approach to the conflict, or with those who have a pro-Russian or pro-American position.

This is not an easy matter, but is the

present low level of active solidarity with the peoples of the region really acceptable?

3. Internationalize opposition to terrorist attacks. We should make each new terror attack an occasion for international condemnation from progressive forces, for the assertion of “people-to-people” solidarity that is independent of governments, through mutual shows of solidarity and joint statements. Yes, state terrorism causes many more victims than Jihadist massacres, but one doesn’t justify the other. Decrying imperialist misdeeds is already part of the radical Left’s DNA. However, with the exception of countries that have spent long years living with the fundamentalist threat, such as Pakistan, decrying Jihadism is not. [15]

This is not about making Jihadism “the main enemy” and promoting “national unity” against it! But nor can we see Jihadism as a “secondary enemy” in order to justify guilty indifference.

27 March 2016

After the attacks on Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Cacher Jewish supermarket: thinking through the new and rethinking the old

11 March 2015, by Pierre Rousset

On the other hand, a significant segment of the radical Left thought it was just business as usual. To be sure, some organizations published declarations of solidarity (and deserve genuine thanks for this) as well as articles grappling with the significance of the events. But many others felt it was enough to score debating points, correct as they may have been (against cross-party national unity, for example); or had as their first concern the need to distance themselves from the victims (declaring “Je ne suis pas *Charlie*” [“I am not *Charlie*”] in flagrant disregard

for the message intended by those saying “Je suis *Charlie*” [“I am *Charlie*”]); or, far worse, felt the urgent task was to assassinate morally those who had just been assassinated physically.

Soon after the events, I co-wrote an article with François Sabado in which we specifically sought to understand what was so unique about the event and its implications in relation to our tasks. [16] No doubt, much more needs to be said on that score, but I’d like the text that follows (and which deals in large measure with the state

of radical-Left opinion) to be read in conjunction with the previous one to avoid pointless repetition.

The unique character of the event

I’ll be referring in particular to an interview with Gilbert Achcar, with which I agree on many points of analysis, but which also contains a number of surprising blind spots. The first of these has to do with the unique

character of the event. Gilbert seeks to trivialize the whole affair. "The reaction [to the attacks] has been what anybody would expect. [...] These were quite similar reactions from appalled and frightened societies [the USA after 911 and France now] and, of course, the crimes were appalling indeed. In both cases, the ruling class took advantage of the shock [...] There is nothing much original about all this. Instead, what is rather original is the way the discussion evolved later on." [17]

Gilbert is quite right to point out [elsewhere in the same interview] that it is extremely exaggerated to place the *Charlie Hebdo* attack and the September 2001 destruction of the World Trade Center Twin Towers on the same footing. And yet millions of people spontaneously took to the streets following the French events, unlike what happened following previous no less atrocious attacks, such as the murder of children in front of a Jewish school in Toulouse.

So, as far as the "national context" is concerned, the reaction to the January crimes is certainly not trivial and merits specific attention. Of course, there is something unpredictable and elusive about such a unique event. How to know which straw will break the camel's back? Let me nonetheless suggest a handful of hypothetical answers. One feature of the attack was that it appeared to have been carried out by a trained military commando, and not by a "lone wolf" - evoking a planned action, organized by one or more movements (an impression subsequently borne out). Then there was the nature of the gory "message": a warning to the press (which journalists clearly felt and understood). Then, with the attack on the Hyper Cacher Jewish grocery store, the perception (also borne out subsequently) that there were multiple targets. And the backdrop of all this: the crisis in Iraq and Syria, the growth of the Islamic State (even if the attack against *Charlie Hebdo* was ordered by Al-Qaida in Yemen). A general feeling that we have entered a new and more dangerous phase. On this point, at least, the comparison with 911 is probably valid, but only if we factor in what has happened over the past decade and half (in particular the

hope and despair of the uprisings in the Arab world).

We have to take this context fully into account. It makes the second unique feature of the January events all the more remarkable, as François Sabado and I said in the opening of our co-authored piece. The mass demonstrations in France expressed open-ended solidarity, massive opposition to racism and to equating terrorism with Islam. In the current context, is this a trivial matter? I don't think so. Quite significantly, in a survey carried out 10 days after the massacre, the Ipsos polling agency found there had been a big decrease in "tensions regarding Islam":

"We have to distinguish between levels and trends. With respect to levels, there are still 47 percent of people in France who, when considering the way the Muslim religion is practised in France, believe that 'this religion is not compatible with the values of French society' which is quite a high level. With respect to the trends, though, this level is 10 points lower - and not higher - than what we observed one year ago. This is where we can see that there has not been an increase in distrust." [18]

Let's just say that the January events have given rise to two contradictory trends within the population. On the one hand, a clear rise in the number of racist and Islamophobic acts, but from a *minority* segment of French society. On the other, a rise in fraternal feeling among the *majority*. [19]

There is a third unique feature that should be highlighted: the solidarity expressed by a number of organizations representing immigrants to France (from North Africa in particular), and from organizations and individuals in a number of Arab and Middle Eastern countries, despite the vicious portrait that has been painted of *Charlie Hebdo*. In our earlier article, we spoke primarily of the feeling of alienation found among marginalized and precariously employed young people, because this is of paramount importance with respect to our responsibilities and tasks. I'd now like to focus on the solidarity that has been

expressed. It is one feature of a contradictory state of affairs, but it is nonetheless revealing of what the main issues are for those who are in the clutches of fundamentalism or feel threatened by it. These same issues are also systematically obscured by those who seek to put *Charlie Hebdo* on trial - when it is not about taking "the French" more generally to task, a combat sport very much in vogue in the Anglo-American world.

It is indeed a commonplace when governments take advantage of such events to enact a new series of freedom-destroying measures and dress up imperialism with talk of human rights. And it works, too, because security measures receive widespread support. On the other hand, the visit "en masse" and in the heat of the events by heads of state and their representatives is not a commonplace. This surprising development was a function of the international context and its novel character, and was definitely not prompted by a desire to defend civil liberties or give a leg up to François Hollande. And this is the fourth unique feature of the January events. It confirms our need for collective thinking about the evolution of the world situation and its implications. [20]

There is of course much in common between what happened in France and in other countries reeling from a devastating attack. So why is it important to underscore the unique character of what happened? To do justice to the event and grasp its complexity. This helps deal with new developments and avoid merely repeating what we have been saying for years. It enables us to more effectively tackle the question of our tasks by avoiding simplistic explanations and one-size-fits-all judgements.

So I'll focus my thinking on what I see to be new and complicated, and regarding which I often don't have tried and tested answers.

Religious

fundamentalism here and there

To a large extent, the Western radical Left is ill-equipped to fight against religious fundamentalism, for a number of reasons.

For many years now, sections of the Western radical Left, and not minor ones, have cast the strong rise of fundamentalism in the Muslim world in a very positive light - as a (more or less distorted) expression of anti-imperialism, whereas they are actually (as in other religions) reactionary and counter-revolutionary currents.

More broadly, a number of currents have adopted the detestable habit of only defending the victims of their "main enemy" (their government, their imperialism), without worrying about the victims of the "enemies of their enemies" - in this case, fundamentalist Islam. They do so in the name of exclusive "priorities" or, worse, on the basis that defending such victims amounts to an act of complicity with imperialism. We should note in passing that the same kind of reasoning can be applied to victims of a so-called "anti-imperialist" dictatorship such as the Assad regime in Syria.

What's more, wrong conclusions have often been drawn on the basis of a correct observation: the condition of populations identified as Muslim is not the same "here at home" as it is in majority-Muslim countries. "Here at home" we of course have to fight racism, state Islamophobia, the racialization of social discrimination, and so forth. However, there is no impenetrable barrier between "over there" and "here at home". Even as "minorities", non-state actors are in a position to practise oppression against other minorities or within "their" own "community" - against women, for example.

Finally, in a large majority of cases, the Western Left is not rooted within precarious layers of the population, even though many solidarity initiatives are organized (including in France, whatever some may say) in support of undocumented immigrants, the

homeless, and so on. As Gilbert Achcar points out, this is a worrying state of affairs, without being specific to France. "What is usually called the 'radical Left' [...] has a poor record on relating to people of immigrant origin. This is a major failure" though, of course, you can find similar situations in most imperialist countries." This considerably limits our ability to act (or even to be well-informed), at a time when these same precarious layers are occupying an increasingly crucial place in a number of our countries.

I don't place an equal sign between "precarious layers" and people "of immigrant origin" (for how many generations is one "of" some "origin" or another?). Both categories are heterogeneous. But if we were better rooted in these social layers, the question of relations with the precarious segment of the immigrant and immigrant-offspring population would at least be partially settled.

The role of political Islam in power (Egypt), and of "radical" Islamisms against popular revolutions in the Arab world, has largely clarified the debate about whether these political-religious currents are progressive or not. As to the impenetrable barrier between over there and here at home, it is actually rather porous after all. That was to be expected (and sometimes it was). The observation is unassailable: Salafism, Wahhabism and other fundamentalisms (including evangelical fundamentalism among Christians) now have roots in Europe. We shouldn't take this question lightly. These movements are enemies of progressives, but also of "non-compliant" Muslims (that is to say, the large majority). They have to be fought with and for Muslims, as part of our project of a society based on solidarity. We have to fight on many fronts at the same time: against anti-egalitarian and discriminatory policies, against Islamophobia and racism, and against the far-Right and religious fundamentalisms that, in France, have become or are once again dangerous political forces (including in their Christian variants).

We're not prepared for this complex fight. We're aware of some of the

causes, but only some of them. To move forward, we can't be satisfied with truisms (however valid they continue to be). We have to closely examine things we're not used to talking about, including things that are unexpected and surprising. Here are two examples.

We never tire of repeating the fact that imperialist wars (such as the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003) have created the fertile ground on which the Islamic State has prospered. Quite right, and we have to keep repeating this so that no one believes that imperialist war is the answer. But another cause are the policies pursued by ruling classes in the Muslim world. A recent issue of the NPA's French-language weekly *l'Anticapitaliste* takes up this question, but only with great trepidation. [21]

After all, fundamentalist movements aren't just reacting to the behaviour of imperialist powers. They have become players in their own right, with their own plans, their own histories and their own roots. It isn't their barbaric acts that should prompt us to address the question of religious fascism. When Farooq Tariq, for example, characterizes some of these movements as representing a new form of religious fascism, he does so on the basis of an assessment of the way their social base has evolved in Pakistan. [22] Is such an assessment open to debate? Of course, but it should at least be taken seriously, coming as it does from a country torn asunder by sectarian conflict.

The backdrop for religious fundamentalisms is evolving rapidly and past analyses, however relevant they may be, have to be brought up to date. The Islamic State, for example, is a recent development and may itself be undergoing rapid change. To be sure, none of the affected countries resemble the Europe of the inter-war period. Still, these movements fulfill functions (against the Arab revolutions, for example) comparable to those of European fascisms (against the workers movement). Some of these movements, in Pakistan at any rate, have built a real mass base within extremely reactionary segments of the educated middle classes [23], and also within

“plebeian” layers through Koranic schools. Perhaps we should speak of fundamentalist political-religious movements of a fascist type. It’s not that I want to come up with a one-size-fits-all term, but I feel there is a need to update our analysis of fundamentalisms (in the plural).

Which brings me to my second example. We (rightly) stress that it’s not religion that lies at the origin of the radicalization of young French nationals going to Syria, but social despair, the daily experience of discrimination, injustice, and the well-known double standard. Religion is only a “vector” and not a “factor”, to use Julien Salingue’s terminology. [24] But once the “vector” has led to sectarian involvement in a fundamentalist current, the latter becomes a “factor” driving forward a social vision (which includes power over women and the dehumanization of the “other”) and cloaking barbaric acts with religious justification, whatever the personal motivations may be. We have to hone in on socio-economic questions to deal with root causes, but this settles neither the political question (new far-Right formations) nor the uses to which religion is put.

And then there are facts that don’t fit in to our traditional analytical approach — and that too, whether or not one believes this approach is valid. For example, what to make of the significant numbers of converts to Islam one finds among the French nationals joining fundamentalist movements? Or the involvement of teenagers from stable families and backgrounds, including from quiet towns in the countryside? There are also highly-skilled young people who would have no difficulty finding employment and yet have chosen to contribute their know-how to the Islamic State (hackers, for example), not to mention those who are taken in by calls for humanitarian assistance in Syria. Indeed, how is it that the usual methods of sects and cults of all sorts — which cut off the targeted individual from their usual environment — work so effectively? I think we would do well to study these questions further to enrich and broaden our understanding.

In France, the bulk of our writing is aimed at countering our leaders’ hypocritical claims and the lies of the dominant ideology. This is correct and necessary. The problem, though, is that with such an approach we risk repeating what we already knew and going no further. We have unambiguously condemned the murders, but often without drawing explicit conclusions in terms of tasks. And yet we have to create much stronger ties than before between solidarity with progressive currents facing fundamentalists (and dictatorial regimes) from Syria to Pakistan, on the one hand, and resistance in Europe to the powerful upsurge of these new far-Right political-religious forces. This is something we have to do in our program and in our methods, with Muslims and in their defense. Otherwise, we won’t be providing convincing alternatives to the security agenda and will be yielding this terrain to our adversaries, the state and the “Western” far-Right.

Is Charlie Hebdo the problem?

In some activist circles in France and, especially, in the international blogosphere (particularly in the English language), the “problem” appears to be none other than *Charlie Hebdo* itself. So much so that some even neglect to condemn the murderers, or support the victims in the way a noose supports a hanged man. I have learned to despise the phrase “of course, murder can never be justified,” invariably followed by a lethal “but...”.

I’ve had a few e-mail exchanges with an Indian correspondent who, having tried to find what in recent issues of *Charlie Hebdo* had “provoked” the attack, was surprised not to find anything. There’s a reason for this: there was no controversy surrounding *Charlie* at the time of the attack. The magazine had fallen back into relative obscurity and was struggling to make ends meet.

If *Charlie Hebdo* hadn’t existed, the January attacks would have taken place nonetheless, because they were a response to the role played by the

French state in the Middle East and Africa. This is why France was chosen rather than Denmark, country of origin of the notorious Muhammad caricatures. [25]

The political targets were the press, the police and Jews. There is no wanting for physical and symbolic targets. Demonized as it was, *Charlie Hebdo* was useful, but in no way indispensable. So it was in no way indispensable to in turn “judge” *Charlie* in order to analyze the nature and scope of the attacks, the nature of the organizations that ordered them and the ways in which the international context has changed. But just as much as there has been a profusion of writing about *Charlie Hebdo*, there has been a paucity of commentary on these questions.

The organizations that ordered or inspired the January attacks spend a great deal of their time massacring Muslims. They manipulate religious feelings as others manipulate national feelings and feelings of identity more broadly. We’re not talking about a bar room brawl between one of *Charlie*’s illustrators and a French youth of Arab background hurt by his drawings! We’re talking about politically rational acts given the goals pursued by al-Qaeda in Yemen and the Islamic State (as for the rationality of the individual perpetrators of the attacks, I prefer to take a more prudent approach than Julien Salingue has). But the political rationality has not caught the attention of many commentators let alone prompted them to investigate the matter further.

“Suis-je *Charlie*?” (“Am I *Charlie*?”) has become the top question agitating the blogosphere. And the question can indeed be the starting point for an interesting series of reflections — but only based on an understanding that the question can feed a dangerous misunderstanding when counterposed to the statement “Je suis *Charlie*”; if it leads to stating “Je ne suis pas *Charlie*” (“I am not *Charlie*”), or something along those lines.

“Je suis *Charlie*” never meant identifying with the real or supposed editorial line of *Charlie Hebdo*, but was simply a statement of human solidarity with the victims. A

straightforward form of solidarity, with no “ifs, ands or buts”, as is called for in such circumstances – and not a political statement. Counterposing “Je ne suis pas *Charlie*” to “Je suis *Charlie*” means beginning to measure out one’s level of solidarity according to one’s level of political agreement. I know that this isn’t the intention of some who have used this fashionable tagline. However, among many others, a desire to minimize solidarity with the victims, to undermine their standing, or even to put them on trial, has been plain to see. And this is a very serious matter.

There are certainly many legitimate debates to be had about creative freedom, press freedom, freedom of expression and the responsibility of creators, journalists and the man and woman on the street. The reasons why French youth of Arab background refuse to identify with *Charlie Hebdo* are clear and legitimate. But here we’re talking about Left political organizations and individuals who, in the aftermath of the attacks, determined that it was more urgent to proclaim “Je ne suis pas *Charlie*” – or even to counterpose the statement “Nous sommes tous des musulmans” (“We are all Muslims”) to “Je suis *Charlie*”. [26] We are to understand, then, that the *real* victims weren’t the ones felled by the assassins’ bullets, but rather those who had supposedly been the object of the murder victims’ derision, because *Charlie Hebdo* was an “ideological representation” of oppression. Richard Fidler (who, it goes without saying, condemns the act of murder) issues the following extraordinary warning: “Above all, we must not allow ourselves to make the same mistake made by the *Charlie Hebdo* assassins – identifying the source of their oppression with its ideological representation, not its material, class basis.” Themselves oppressors of Muslims, the assassins didn’t make any mistakes as far as selecting targets goes. Their targets were perfectly in keeping with the goals of fundamentalist movements.

The British SWP pushed things particularly far in this area. The Central Committee statement released following the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre is written from start to finish in such a way as to minimize the responsibility

of the assassins, even if the attack is described as “wrong and completely unacceptable” and the killings as “horrific”. Alongside imperialism, *Charlie Hebdo* comes off as a major guilty party due to its “provocative and racist attacks on Islam,” adding for good measure that while “that does not justify the killings, but it is essential background.” The only task of the hour is therefore to “unite against racism and Islamophobia”. [27] It’s easy to understand why the SWP would react in this way, given that it has to erase its tracks and blind readers to its own responsibilities. It was one of the main organizations of the radical Left to describe the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as the expression of a new anti-imperialism. And when women in Britain itself called on progressive forces to support them against the fundamentalist threat, the SWP made it nearly impossible for them to get a hearing on the Left.

Is *Charlie Hebdo* racist?

Charlie Hebdo is a magazine, not an organization. It is put out by a number of journalists with a fairly wide range of opinions. Parts of its history have been turbulent and questionable, such as the chapter that followed the 911 attacks under the editorship of Philippe Val. I have to confess that I have never been a reader of *Charlie Hebdo* or the *Canard enchaîné*, although I very much liked the work of the murder victims – especially of Cabu, Wolinsky, Charb and Tignous. Their drawings regularly appeared in Left-activist publications, such as *Rouge*, my own organization’s newspaper for many years. Others have written about the history of *Charlie Hebdo* and its illustrators better than I could. [28]

Was *Charlie Hebdo* the ideal victim? Perhaps not, but why should it be? The accusations levied against *Charlie*’s murder cartoonists often sound like the charges directed at a woman who has been raped. Wasn’t she dressed very scantily? Wasn’t her behaviour provocative? Doesn’t she have a wayward past? First comes suspicion then comes the indictment: *Charlie*

Hebdo was racist. In much of the English-language blogosphere, the verdict has been promptly delivered, an open-and-shut case, repeated round-the-clock, indisputable.

Trial by falsification is a simple affair. You merely have to select those drawings that might seem racist while ignoring the much larger number that are explicitly anti-racist. [29] You describe any cartoon of Muhammad as Islamophobic, even when the point is to distinguish between Islam and fundamentalists – such as Cabu’s famous cover illustration presenting the Prophet with his head in his hands bemoaning that “it’s tough to be loved by fools”. Incidentally, many English-language commentators display characteristic cultural imperialism when they refuse to take into account French traditions of satirical cartooning and anticlericalism (or do so only to criticize these traditions).

In any case, many don’t seek to understand complexity but rather to give a dog a bad name and shoot it. It’s absolutely frightening to see this approach at work and to see where it can lead. After all, as Gilbert Achcar says, “Some of the people involved in *Charlie Hebdo* were very much on the left. Stéphane Charbonnier, known as Charb, the editor of the magazine, who was the principal target of the assassins, was, by any standard, someone on the left. He had close ties with the Communist Party and the general milieu of the Left. His funerals were held to the tune of ‘The Internationale’ [30] and his eulogy by Luz, a surviving member of the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial staff, included a bitter criticism of the French right and far right, and of the Pope as well as of Benjamin Netanyahu. In this respect, the comparison that some have made of *Charlie Hebdo* to a Nazi publication publishing anti-Semitic cartoons in Nazi Germany is completely absurd. *Charlie Hebdo* is definitely not a far-right publication – and present-day France definitely not a Nazi-like state.”

Or as Michaël Löwy wrote the day after the massacre: “Infamy. That is the only word that can sum up how we feel about the murder of our friends at *Charlie Hebdo*. A crime made even more hateful because these artist

comrades were people on the left, anti-racists, anti-fascists, anti-colonialists, sympathizers with communism and anarchism. [31] Just recently they contributed to a volume published in honour of the memory of a group of Algerians murdered by the French police in Paris on 17 October 1961. Their only weapons were the pen, humour, irreverence, and insolence – including against religion, in keeping with the age-old anti-clerical tradition of the French Left. On the cover of the last issue of the magazine before they were killed was a cartoon against the Islamophobic French novelist Michel Houellebecq, and inside was a page of cartoons against religion...the Catholic religion. Let's remember that Charb, the editor-in-chief, was a cartoonist with revolutionary sympathies. He drew the illustrations for French revolutionary socialist Daniel Bensaïd's book *Marx: mode d'emploi* [Marx: A User's Manual]. Charb was also in attendance at the evening tribute event that was held for Bensaïd following his death, and drew a number of wry and affectionate caricatures that were projected onto the screen all through the evening." [32]

Some commentators even picked apart the issue put together by surviving contributors ten days after the massacre. Now I find this rather distasteful keeping in mind the psychological state the team must have been in while they worked. But read what Luz had to say [33] about the cover page he drew for the issue, depicting Muhammad holding a "Je suis *Charlie*" sign in his hands under the headline "All is forgiven" – a cover page that came into being with great difficulty. "[I thought about] the reason why part of the *Charlie* team was killed [the drawing of Muhammad on the cover of *Charlie Hebdo*]' and which also got our offices firebombed [in 2011]. I spoke to him. My poor old friend, I drew you back in 2011 and that caused us a lot of bother. In a way, it was almost like we were forgiving one another. As the illustrator, I was saying 'I'm really sorry about dragging you into this,' while he, as a character, who was forgiving me, was saying 'It's no big deal, you're alive, so you can keep drawing me.'" Is this what an

Islamophobic racist would say?

As the imam and rector of the Bordeaux mosque Tareq Oubrou has said, "A cartoon is a cartoon. We are in a free country and it's thanks to this freedom that Muslims can express themselves and practise their religion. We shouldn't saw off the branch we're sitting on [...]. The aim of these cartoons is conciliation; they're even an act of kindness. You have to see the cartoons as something external to the problem of depicting the Prophet per se. [34]

Riss has replaced Charb as *Charlie Hebdo* editor-in-chief. He was injured in the attack (a bullet in the shoulder). Interviewed while leaving hospital, he spoke about the massacre, the history of *Charlie Hebdo* (which "to our great surprise has been turned into a symbol of the fight for secularism") and concluded by saying, "People will eventually understand that all Muslims are not destined to become terrorists. You can be Muslim in a democracy, there's no problem with that. Only dishonest people equate Islam with terrorism. And we can see who's behind this. Terrorists have nothing to do with the overwhelming majority of French nationals of Muslim faith." [35] Is this what an Islamophobic racist would say?

All these remarks were made in the aftermath of an appalling ordeal. And yet our falsifiers don't care a jot about this. They carefully neglect to inform their audience about the victims' activist commitments or about the survivors' statements against equating Muslims with terrorists. These commentators also don't have much to say about the Jewish victims of the attacks. Empathy and humanity aren't their strong point. What kind of society would such people usher in?

Three questions to conclude

I've taken the time to defend the victims of the January 7th attack because this is what those of us who knew them personally and used so many of their illustrations owe them in the face of such slanderous accusations. [36]

Shortly after the massacre, Luz, one of the survivors, gave a doubt-laden interview that I think should be read by anyone seeking to understand. "We have been forced to shoulder responsibility for symbolic connotations that don't exist in Charlie's cartoons. [...] Since the publication of the Muhammad cartoons, the irresponsible nature of cartoons has gradually disappeared [...] our cartoons are read literally. Since 2007, Charlie has been scrutinized under the microscope of responsibility. Every one of our cartoons is now liable to being read through the lens of geopolitical conflicts and internal French political squabbles. These problems are laid on our doorstep. But we're simply a magazine that is bought, opened and closed. When people post our cartoons on the Internet, or when the media draw attention to some of our cartoons, that's their fault. Not ours. [...] Unlike Anglo-American illustrators or [Le Monde illustrator] Plantu, Charlie fights against symbolism. Doves of peace and other metaphors of a world at war aren't our cup of tea. We work on points of detail [...] and tie them into French humour. Sometimes cutesy, other times crass [...] Charlie is the sum of a number of very different people [...]. The nature of the cartoon changed depending on which cartoonist was working on it and their individual style, and on their political past in some cases, or artistic past in others. But this humility and diversity of expression no longer exist. Each cartoon is seen as having been drawn by all of us. [Becoming a unanimous symbol for national unity] helps Hollande rally the nation together. It helps [Front National leader] Marine Le Pen call for a reinstatement of the death penalty. Everyone can use this kind of broad symbolism in any way that catches their fancy. Even Poutine can agree with a dove of peace. But that's precisely what set Charlie's cartoons apart, since you couldn't do whatever you fancied with them. When we surgically lampoon different sorts of obscurantism, when we hold political positions up to ridicule, we are not becoming a symbol. Charb, whom I consider to be the Jean-Marc Reiser of the late 20th-early 21st century, was a social commentator. He drew what

was under the gloss, slightly ugly people with big noses. Right now we're covered in a thick layer of gloss and I'm going to find that difficult." [37]

Creative freedom, freedom of expression and responsibility

"Complete freedom for art" is what we used to say. [38] It might be useful to revisit surrealism in light of current debates regarding the relationship between the creator (no pun intended) and responsibility. Luz places *Charlie Hebdo* in the tradition of the illustrator's limited responsibility. Responsibility ends with the publication of the magazine and doesn't take into account the possible uses that others will make of the cartoons for fear of stifling creation and getting mired in symbolism. Those more knowledgeable than I describe this as a matter of the ethics of conviction versus the ethics of responsibility. [39]

From an activist's point of view (which is not the same as a creator's), one cannot ignore the predictable consequences of one's provocations. Attacking the goody-two-shoes of all religions is a very good thing indeed. Still, in France, can you take the same approach toward Muslim upholders of righteousness as you do toward their Catholic counterparts? I don't think you can, because it means ignoring the relationship of oppression that changes the way writing or illustrations are read. To my knowledge, this is a question that *Charlie Hebdo's* editorial team didn't want to take into account and this explains (but only in part) the intensity of debates within the French Left about *Charlie's* editorial line. Provocation becomes difficult when identity-based conflicts are on the rise.

I nevertheless disagree with advocates of self-censorship. We must be blasphemous. Otherwise, we are in practice agreeing with the guardians of virtue who criminalize blasphemy.

It shouldn't be necessary to recall that the criminalization of blasphemy doesn't seek to protect believers but rather to suppress opponents, like the crimes of *lèse-majesté* and desecrating national symbols (one of my first acts of protest was to refuse to rise for the French national anthem).

Serious thinking about these questions is entirely legitimate. [40] I just doubt that its outcome can be a set of rules applicable everywhere and always.

Secularism, republicanism and post-colonialism

For Gilbert Achcar, the problem at hand stems in large measure from a tradition of "the Left's arrogant secularism" that maybe fed by anticlericalism rooted in the long history of the French Left. For others, it's about post-colonialism. Either way, there is supposedly a specifically "French problem". A Filipino friend quite innocently asked me if the failure to organize immigrant workers in France was due to the fact that the country hadn't come to terms with its colonial past - which implied that the failure was less obvious in other imperialist countries.

I was struck by the friend's question because we had just gone through the huge marches of January, which were remarkable in their rejection of xenophobia - whereas the US was nearly simultaneously rocked by the scandal of the raft of police murders of Blacks covered up by juries of peers. True, France's colonial past has not been resolved, and especially not the Algerian War whose reputation the Right would like to rehabilitate. But the major powers of the 19th and 20th centuries were Anglo-American. Britain's looting of the world produced massive famines. The US was built upon a genocide (of Native Americans) and in part also on the massive use of slaves. Where exactly in the imperialist world has this past been resolved?

Yes, the organization of immigrant workers in France has largely been a failure, in part due to the position of

the Communist Party (PCF) during the Algerian War. But where exactly has it been a real success? A number of struggles by immigrant workers have taken place in France in recent years, especially through the creation of committees of undocumented workers on the basis of national or regional origin. They have been supported by trade unions (including the CGT) and ordinary citizens. The government was hoping to trap undocumented workers by taking their children hostage as they made their way home from school. In response, a very active network of parents and teachers was established to protect the children and their families from the police and deportation. All this is nowhere near enough, of course, but where is the situation qualitatively so much more wonderful?

My somewhat different starting point is the observation that integration policies have been a failure across the board. The far-Right is threateningly on the rise almost everywhere in Europe. This is the case even in countries which never (or barely) had colonies outside of Europe, so it's clear that the post-colonial explanation doesn't go very far. [41] The common explanatory thread running through all these countries is actually the universality of destructive neoliberal policies. In response, then, the arc of resistance has to be anchored in struggles around socio-economic questions.

To be sure, in France we have specific problems stemming from a specific history. My generation didn't learn how to deal with questions of "identity" or religion because they weren't raised in such terms during our formative activist years. North African immigrants, for example, had a working-class consciousness. As Olivier Adam has humorously said, we lived in a "blessed era" and a "world without God". [42] *Charlie Hebdo* was also cast from this mould. Yes, we can learn from countries that have a different history. But the reverse is also true. Is it not a problem that so many European countries still have royal families and state Churches - not least for the non-Christians excluded from this highly "visible" history? Isn't the relative radicalism of the separation between Church and State

found in France a useful cornerstone for building equal citizenship for all?

Far more than an expression of support for cross-party national unity, the January marches were a show of republican unity – a specific, generous vision of the Republic and of shared citizenship. A vision, though, that is not recognized by those living on the margins, who know full well that equality is not the reality of the actually existing Republic. Indeed, the way the republic (and now also secularism) is conceived is a political battleground in France. “Secularism” (even “secularism *À la française*”) and “Republic” do not exist as monolithic entities. And this is why the banner of the “social Republic” is so important, as a way of refusing to yield to our adversaries a large swathe of popular history, which would ensure the victory of the Republic of the ruling classes.

Solidarity and identity

I’ve been really struck by the difficulty many organizations (and individuals) have had in standing back to assess the events of January. Many have analyzed the events solely through the prism of their particular areas of work – or of their own personal histories. I’m worried that this is merely a reflection of the level of fragmentation of activist thinking and action (and also, frankly speaking, of the individualism and narcissism inherent to the dominant ideology of neoliberalism).

This fragmentation is deadly. The current ruling order is entirely lacking in legitimacy, whether democratic (fostering increasingly authoritarian regimes), socio-economic (destroying social rights) or historical. Its main strength lies in the division of the exploited and oppressed. It therefore

seeks to destroy old forms of solidarity and prevent the formation of new ones. To this end, it uses every arrow in its quiver: young against old, men against women, stable jobs against precarious ones, nationals against immigrants, Chinese against Arabs, long-established Arab immigrants against recent ones, one type of racism against another, to name a few.

From this angle, the attack on the Hyper Cacher Jewish supermarket may have serious consequences, setting “community against community” – cloaked under, and exacerbated by, the domestic impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Similarly, the government has been exploiting the January events to push through its program of bringing the schools to heel and imposing an anti-democratic and socially conservative agenda against young people. The target right now are young people who, in the absence of classroom discussion, refused to observe the minute of silence in memory of the *Charlie Hebdo* victims – most of whom happened to be of Muslim background. But the broader target are the “dangerous” classes and age groups, leading to a three-fold discrimination on the basis of “race”, generation and socio-economic background.

Unity of the exploited and oppressed will not be built by denying the importance of specific discrimination faced by “visible minorities”, in a way that prevents them from effectively asserting their own rights. Nor will it be achieved by pursuing identity politics that prioritize difference over collective resistance. Without a common fight, the battle is lost before it has begun. Such a fight requires reciprocal recognition of shared rights, but also a common socio-economic underpinning. The choice is clear, well and truly strategic in nature – and has concrete implications.

There are many types of racism at work in France, and not just one. The Roma are indisputably the most oppressed – scapegoats *par excellence*. Those identified as Arab and Muslim are the most broadly discriminated against and the target of the dominant narrative. Whatever their religion, Blacks remain Blacks, victims of a more prototypical form of racism. In the recent period, Jews have been the only ones to have been the victims of targeted assassinations (in Toulouse, Brussels and at the Hyper Cacher Jewish supermarket [43]). Some forms of racism are forged by the state, while others aren’t – but all of them are poisonous, solidarity-destroying sources of division and dehumanization. And all of them must be fought in all-encompassing expressions of solidarity. So it would be better to avoid issuing anti-racist statements that fall short of this.

There are multiple victims. Let’s defend all of them, within our means but with no pecking order, whosoever the oppressor may be. Should we defend Muslims *with* Muslims, shoulder-to-shoulder and without paternalism? Absolutely. That’s how we should defend the victims of Islamophobia – and also women “of Muslim background” who are victims of both ordinary and fundamentalist sexism. Can we all agree on this?

We have a lot of work to do in order to bring ourselves up to date around a wide range of questions. But this work requires a guiding principle: the convergence of resistance, the building of solidarity, and the unity of the exploited and the oppressed.

Translation from French: Nathan Rao for ESSF.

* Five footnotes have been added to the original French version: 4, 10, 14, 23 and 28.

Is Solidarity Without Identity Possible?

16 February 2015, by **Cinzia Arruzza**

Since then messages of solidarity stating “Je suis Charlie” – “I am Charlie” – have been flooding the web and other media, a massive manhunt to capture the killers is taking place, shotguns have been fired against two mosques, a kebab shop has been bombed, and all French political leaders have appealed to national unity in defense of the République. Sadly enough, this means that the attack might have been a successful one. Of all the targets the attackers could choose, they deliberately chose a magazine that, in spite of the controversies about the quite Islamophobic vignettes it published, still had credibility among the French Left. A magazine, moreover, that embodied a distinctively French tradition of secularist irreverence, the distinctively French pride of being free to satirize both God and the King, enjoying dwelling in the trivial obscenities of the genre. The target was politically and carefully chosen. The narrative about the direct correspondence between the publication of irreverent vignettes of Muhammad and the attack, as in some sort of mechanical cause-and-effect connection, is over-simplistic. Nor is the narrative about attacks on freedom of speech and of press sufficient to understand what is really happening. The strategy behind the attack aims at a polarization of French society, at an escalation of the conflict, and above all at the resuscitation of the mantra of “the clash of civilizations.” It further isolates the Muslim population in France (around five million people) and exposes it to a further escalation of the already worrying and rampant Islamophobia. It is pushing the white population to gather behind the banners of the national republican unity and identity perceived as under attack from the new French, that is, the Muslim French. And, in order not to leave any option of resistance other than radical Islamism to the Muslim

population, it is hitting the French Left, the only barrier against an uncontrolled proliferation of Islamophobia in the country, where it hurts the most: in its troubles in dealing with France’s colonial past and legacy and in reformulating universalism in such a way as to give full inclusion to Arab and Muslim people.

Charlie Hebdo is an extreme symptom of the troubles of the French Left. Its covers alternate denouncing and criticizing French policies against immigrants and Houellebecq’s Islamophobic paranoia with an endless series of vignettes targeting “les islamistes.” Following the killing of a thousand Muslim Brothers in the 2013 Rabaa massacre in Egypt, CH published a cover with a vignette saying: “Le Coran, c’est de la merde, ça n’arrête pas les balles” (The Quran is a piece of shit: it doesn’t stop bullets).

Its defenders, in the wake of the criticisms and accusations of Islamophobia Charlie Hebdo started to receive, kept pointing out that its satire was addressed to all religions indiscriminately. Whether this is true or not (and I think it is not entirely true), this answer shows a fundamental misunderstanding about context – that same misunderstanding that led part of the French left to capitulate in favor of an abstract republican secularism on the occasion of the discussions regarding the scarf law. Muslims are not only a largely oppressed and exploited minority in France, they are increasingly becoming the scapegoat of the economic crisis, the mirror upon which white Europeans project their deepest nightmares and fears. Every single week in Germany several thousands of people gather in various cities under the organizational denomination of PEGIDA for demonstrations against the “Islamization des Abendlandes”

(PEGIDA stands for “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West”).

An Italian rightwing newspaper published the photo of the attack on Charlie Hebdo under the title “This is Islam,” and a large part of the Italian population would be perfectly happy to let Muslim immigrants sink without help in the Mediterranean. In this worrying, and honestly scary, context, the repeated publication of vignettes caricaturizing Islamists by adopting religious symbols and stereotypical representations that by the same token identify five million oppressed people living in France was not an act of courage.

In spite of my very dear memory of Charb’s sweet, humorous, and moving vignettes about Daniel Bensaïd, I cannot bring myself to participate in the choir and say that “I am Charlie.” But here is the problem. This attack and these murders push people like me into a corner, as they make it extremely difficult for us to say that we find this act of violence disgusting and unacceptable, that we deeply loathe the politics, strategy, and means of radical Islamists, that we are in pain for the people who have been murdered, but that yet we cannot identify ourselves with Charlie Hebdo. And we cannot deploy the expected slogan of “We are all French” in this moment in which a specific version of French national identity was mobilized to oppress those French citizens who cannot possibly identify with it.

This tiny space, the space for a solidarity capable of challenging identities, rather than reinforcing or restating them, for a solidarity that does not need the affirmation of a common identity to express itself, is the space that the attack against Charlie Hebdo risks closing, forcing all of us to participate, willingly or unwillingly, directly or indirectly, in the renewed farce of the clash of civilizations.

We are NOT Charlie Hebdo!

16 February 2015, by United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC)

By the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC)

Yes, 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 American Muslims, 100,000 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.

We will NOT join the Paris parades orchestrated by imperialist French President Francois Holland and the heads of state of the world's "great powers;" nor will we applaud their call for the worldwide "Anti-terrorist Conference" that President Holland has set for Paris. We are saddened at the participation of French working people in these state-sponsored mobilizations, whose objectives are to further war in the Middle East and Africa and to restrict democracy for Muslim communities in France and around the world. Those who participate believing that they can advance freedom of expression, peace and solidarity are being used for opposite ends.

The war proclaimed by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls as "... a war against terrorism. Against jihadism. Against radical Islam, against everything that is aimed at breaking fraternity, freedom and solidarity" is, in fact, a war to reestablish and

strengthen French economic hegemony in her former colonies. As Americans we heard this language from President George Bush when he declared his own "war on terror," shredded the U.S. Constitution, imprisoned the innocent en masse and went to war in Iraq based on the now-exposed false flag lie that the Hussein government possessed "weapons of mass destruction."

We don't march with "leaders" - including the government of the United States and the Barack Obama administration - who oversee and direct mass murder and torture. Need we mention the recent U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee Report revealing the extent of U.S.-sponsored torture?

The heads of state of the world's past and present colonial conquerors today murder with impunity on every continent. President Obama is the headmaster of terrorist wars, with six to his credit since his 2008 election. Need we mention the U.S. drone terror bombings and overt wars in Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Syria, Somalia and Iraq? Every public poll demonstrates massive majority opposition. Yet the wars continue and expand everywhere.

France's largest party, the neo-fascist National Front of Marine Le Pen, revels in the government-promoted hate-mongering, thinking its time has come. In the past few days some 50 Muslim mosques in France have been hit by bullets and explosives and/or tagged with racist graffiti. In Corsica, a severed pig's head was mounted on a Muslim prayer wall. In Sweden a Muslim mosque was firebombed. Racist mobilizations in Germany denounce the "Islamization of Europe."

As in the U.S., where Latinos flee Latin America to escape poverty and persecution stemming from the

policies of U.S.-backed corrupt and murderous regimes, Muslim immigrants flee their homelands that have been ravaged by the wars and exploitation of foreign powers.

We hear no imperialist voices denouncing French troops in Mali. No corporate media voices recalling France's Vietnam in Algeria, where one million were slaughtered until that nation's war for independence was won. Imperialism's memory is short, as with the four million Vietnamese murdered in that ten-year U.S. colonial war. As social justice and antiwar activists our memory is long. We are not deceived by yet another imperialist campaign to justify the perpetration of new horrors on the world's people.

Neither do we support the renewed calls for stepped up repressive measures, including billions more for police and military repression and new laws further restricting civil liberties and democratic rights.

As U.S. social and political activists, we are witness to the horror of institutionalized racism, where Ferguson-type police murder is the norm for most every city - where mass incarceration of the oppressed ranks first in the world - where repeated police murder of unarmed Blacks goes unpunished. We march for the victims in Ferguson and in every city, not for their murderers.

We note the racist parallels between France and the U.S. The great majority who are locked in U.S. prisons are Black and Latino. In France up to 60 percent of the prison population are Muslims.

France, England, the U.S. and their associates have no standing among human beings who seek justice, peace, civil and democratic rights and an end

to imperialist wars across the globe. We stand without equivocation with the millions who mobilize against them.

We refused to hail their slaughter, as with their "humanitarian war" against Libya that was perversely promoted by their kept media. Tens of thousands of Libyans were murdered while the corporate "free press" remained silent. The imperialist air and naval forces that pulverized Libya were employed with impunity, while on the ground imperialism's paid jihadists were called into service to "liberate" Tripoli on the bombed ruins of that nation. They remain today, grotesquely fighting each other over Libya's oil and for scraps of "aid" from the various imperialist-backed oil corporations who are the real "victors."

Today's modern-day crusaders continue to join in the catastrophic destruction of Iraq. Twenty-four years of saturation bombings, mass murder and U.S.-installed dictators were and continue to be employed in the name of a war against non-existent "weapons of mass destruction." One and a half million Iraqis have been slaughtered by imperialist weapons. The slaughter continues - a classic colonial-era oil war for control of the

very fossil fuel resource whose continued use spells doom for humankind. And yesterday's U.S. allies in this venture are today's "enemies" - at least for now!

The United States, with French support, has brought about the death and immiseration of hundreds of thousands of Syrians through its backing, covert and otherwise, of "moderate" and fundamentalist combatants, the latter mustered with the aid of the allied Gulf States. The current U.S. bombing of Syrian sites continues the slaughter of civilians.

We heard no cry of outrage from the imperialist nations when Mubarak's military heirs in Egypt, financed, to the tune of \$1.1 billion annually, slaughtered tens of thousands of Muslims in a U.S.-backed coup that overthrew the elected Mohamed Morsi government. The 30-year Mubarak dictatorship was always a U.S. favorite, as are his successors today - democratic elections notwithstanding!

We heard no cry of outrage last year when racist, Zionist Israel once again slaughtered over 2000 Palestinians in Gaza. Indeed, the U.S. and its imperialist allies remain Israeli's chief supporters, granting it the largest

"aid" package of any nation to maintain its world-repudiated historic occupation.

We stand in solidarity with all victims of imperialist oppression and exploitation everywhere on earth - for free speech, the right to assembly, democratic rights and the right to be free intervention and occupation.

Never with their oppressors!

Never with their oil wars!

Never with their police state measures!

Never with their ceaseless racist "wars on terror!"

Never with their endless drone wars, privatized army wars, overt and covert wars, mass detention and torture wars, embargo, blockade and sanction wars!

End all imperialist wars, occupations, and interventions!

Self-determination for the world's oppressed people and nations!

U.S. and all imperialist powers: Out Now!

Drafted by Jeff Macker

Charlie Hebdo: Imperialism's new 9/11?

16 February 2015, by Jeff Mackler

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 Yatseyuk, 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.

Socialists 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.

[Socialist Action](#)