

Europe strengthens repressive powers of the state

Peter Schwarz
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The anti-Islamic film *The Innocence of Muslims* has triggered a storm of protest extending from Indonesia in Southeast Asia to Tunisia in northwestern Africa. The sheer magnitude of the protests demonstrates that they are not simply a response to the ravings of individual religious fanatics, but an expression of broad popular opposition to the US and its European allies, which have plunged the affected countries into war, humiliated their peoples, and exploited them as cheap labor.

The ruling circles of Europe have responded to the protests by defending the anti-Islamic propaganda in the name of free speech, while suppressing demonstrations against these racist provocations and strengthening their own state apparatuses. The most striking example is France, where the government has banned all protests against the defamatory Muhammad cartoons published by the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

This buildup of state power is directed against the entire working class. The ruling class anticipates violent class struggles. Social contradictions and tensions in Europe are rapidly increasing as the euro crisis intensifies and a new recession gathers pace.

The French government claims it is acting in defense of freedom of expression, but grants this right only to the satirical magazine while denying it to those who feel offended and denigrated by the caricatures. In other countries, too, freedom of expression is used to justify the defamatory cartoons while protests against them are criminalized.

In Germany, the writer Günter Wallraff has called for “flooding the media with religious caricatures”. Wallraff told the newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, “If super-saturation with so-called blasphemous caricatures and texts is carried out systematically, it can work the way

it should--for a strengthening of the press, art, and freedom of expression and a clear defense of democratic positions.” He continued, “In the case of the Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, the most important thing was that other media decided to reprint his cartoons.”

Westergaard is one of the authors of the notorious Mohammed cartoons published by the right-wing Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten* in 2006 with the aim of provoking Muslims.

Wallraff once earned a reputation for socially critical investigative journalism. Today he finds himself in an alliance with German Christian Democratic leader Angela Merkel and other reactionaries. Merkel honored Westergaard two years ago by awarding him the European Media Prize. The speech at the award ceremony was given by right-winger Joachim Gauck, the current German president. He described the award as a “call to all, to stand firm, righteous and courageous.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in 2006, “These crude caricatures, intended to insult and incite Muslim sensibilities, are a political provocation” and have “nothing to do with freedom of the press or the defense of secularism.” (See: “European media publish anti-Muslim cartoons: An ugly and calculated provocation”). On the basis of the same argument, i.e., free speech, one could defend the anti-Semitic cartoons published in the Nazi rag *Der Sturmer*.

The latest caricatures published by *Charlie Hebdo*, which reprinted the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons six years ago, are of a piece with the racist campaign against Muslims in the form of the ban on the Muslim headscarf in French schools, the dissemination of anti-Islamic bigotry by Thilo Sarrazin in Germany, and the recent debate, also in Germany, over a ban on

circumcision.

One does not need to be a follower of Islam to understand the outrage felt by Muslims around the world, who for years have been plunged into war, targeted for drone attacks, and subjected to humiliation by the imperialist powers, only to be insulted with racist caricatures printed by a media that claims to defend the values of Western democracy and civilization.

The aim of this anti-Islamic campaign is to divide the working class, suppress opposition to imperialist war, whip up right-wing forces, and direct growing social tensions into reactionary, racist channels.

This is clearly demonstrated by a long interview given by the head of the neo-fascist National Front to the French daily *Le Monde*. Marine Le Pen supports the crackdown against Muslims by the governing Socialist Party, which she describes as a blow for freedom of expression and the press, as well as the principles and values of the French republic. Secularism and liberty, she suggests, can be defended only by a strong state. Speaking of “the protection that the state must bring,” she tells *Le Monde*, “There is a need for authority.”

Taken to its logical conclusion, this stance demands not only the suppression of Islamic symbols, but also the banning of Jewish symbols. Le Pen wants to prohibit the use of kosher and halal meals in schools and ban the wearing of both Islamic headscarves and Jewish skullcaps in public. Anti-Islamism turns out to be the twin brother of anti-Semitism and has the same purpose: the incitement of backwardness, ethnic tensions and religious hatreds.

Rejection of the defamatory Muhammad cartoons does not mean giving support to a government ban, as demanded by figures in the German government parties who fear social upheaval. A number of these right-wingers have even argued for the reintroduction of the blasphemy clauses in the Criminal Code, which in the past served as an infamous weapon of clerical reaction. This is merely the flip side of the strengthening of the state apparatus demanded by the defenders of the Muhammad cartoons.

The fight against racism and the defense of democratic rights is inextricably linked to the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program. Only the unity of working people across all national and ethnic boundaries in a

struggle against capitalist exploitation, oppression and war can remove the basis for political reaction and religious obscurantism.

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