Riots hit Trappes, France after police arrest family of veiled Muslim woman

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22 July 2013

Friday and Saturday night saw rioting in the southwestern Paris suburb of Trappes, after police brutally arrested a Muslim family, including a woman wearing a full-body veil.

The reactionary 2011 law banning the public wearing of full-body veils—such as burqas, niqabs, or balaclavas—has intensified racial and religious prejudices in France, leading to many confrontations between police and Muslims. This Thursday, police in Trappes demanded that a veiled woman remove her veil, subsequently detaining her husband and claiming that he had tried to strangle a police officer during the arrest.

Several hundred protesters attacked a Trappes police station Friday night, trying to free him, burning bus shelters and cars. Six people were detained and several wounded, including four policemen and one 14-year-old boy shot in the face with a rubber bullet, who may lose an eye.

The man was released from police custody on Saturday, as his wife's testimony about the arrest was published and directly contradicted the police's story. He still faces trial in September, however.

Speaking to the Collective against Islamophobia in France (CCIF), she said, "They wanted to stop us because of my full-face veil. As usual, I cooperated. I was going to raise my veil when I saw one of the policemen violently push my mother."

Police threatened her husband when he asked them to stop. Then, she continued, "Once the policeman was finished with my mother, he came towards me making big gestures in my face and speaking aggressively. Frightened, I asked him to be quiet. He then grabbed me by the veil at the level of my head and dragged me with monstrous force before slamming me onto the hood of the car, shouting, 'Are you talking to me? Are you talking to me?'

"I turned around, and I saw two policemen holding my husband on the ground and handcuffing him. Once we were in the car, they shouted at us as if we were dogs. They threatened my husband with clenched fists, saying, 'What are you going to do now, you little fag,' and hitting him in the car. At the police station, the policemen insulted me, calling me a ghost."

Rioting continued on the night of Saturday to Sunday, spreading to nearby towns including Guyancourt, Maurepas, and Elancourt, where a police car burned after being hit with a Molotov cocktail. Several riot police vehicles parked outside police headquarters in Trappes, where police clashed again with several dozen inhabitants of the town who allegedly shot fireworks at police.

Four youths were arrested and charged with participating in the Friday riots yesterday, as over 150 riot police were still stationed in Trappes.

Interior Minister Manuel Valls said, "A substantial security presence will be maintained until a lasting calm returns to the area." He also dismissed the testimony of the veiled woman from Trappes, saying that he was sure police had treated her respectfully.

The Trappes riots make clear the reactionary and racist character of the 2011 ban on full-face or full-body veils. Proposed by right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy and André Gerin of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), it enjoyed the support of the entire French political establishment.

Passed in blatant violation of secularist principles of the French constitution—which calls for state neutrality in religion, thus precluding the banning of practices of a particular religion—the law has become a pretext for terrorizing working class Muslim communities.

Now, as anger mounts with Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande's moves to cut pensions and carry out further attacks on workers' social rights, the police are launching further strong-armed operations, inciting a law-and-order climate. The broader purpose of

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such operations is to divide the working class along ethnic and religious lines, while creating the conditions to impose further social cuts.

This underscores the reactionary role of pseudo-left groups like Workers Struggle (LO) or the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), which both accepted the burqa ban and promoted Hollande's candidacy as a more left-wing alternative to Sarkozy in last year's presidential elections. They have created a political climate in which the only visible source of opposition to Hollande comes from racist forces on the far right. Such forces then benefit from the racist climate stoked by the PS and its law-and-order measures.

The main political beneficiary in the current situation is Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist National Front (FN). Her favorability ratings have increased to 31 percent. She reacted to the Trappes riots by denouncing the inhabitants as "out of control scum," saying, "It is time to thump our fists on the table to organize the reconquering by law and order of every square meter of our national territory."

Earlier last week, two suspects had been arrested for threatening a veiled woman in Trappes with a knife on Bastille Day, allegedly while drunk. Some reports indicated that they were members of far-right groups.

Inhabitants of Trappes who spoke to the media made clear the deep social anger that has developed over social conditions and police brutality under both Sarkozy and Hollande, and which finds no reflection inside the political establishment. One said, "We are sick and tired of police bandits who compete at the 'who arrests veiled women the best' game."

An inhabitant of Trappes whose car had been damaged during the rioting. told *Le Monde*, "It will certainly start up again. But it's 50-50, the police are looking for trouble, too. When you are searched 100 times, the 101st time things explode."

Another said, "The entire city is angry. Do you think people are revolting just because a police search went badly? It is the entire atmosphere in Trappes that makes us want a revolution."

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