

Muslim girl expelled from French high school for wearing long skirt

Anthony Torres
4 May 2015

A high school girl from northeastern France was expelled for wearing a skirt that school authorities considered too long and an ostentatious sign of her religious beliefs. The affair points to the anti-Muslim atmosphere that now predominates in official circles in France.

The teenager was expelled from her high school for nine days by the principal. The ministry of education defended the decision: “In this case, it was considered that the student was carrying out religious propaganda. It is not an expulsion that was put in place, but a dialogue that has been opened up with her family. And it is noteworthy that her mother made a statement to ask for the situation to be handled calmly.”

The absurd and reactionary treatment meted out to the student reflects the sharp rightward evolution of the French political establishment over the last decade. The school expelled the student based on the 2004 law outlawing all “ostentatious” religious symbols, even though the young woman was not wearing any visible religious sign.

The high school student’s case is not isolated. Last year, 130 similar cases took place and 20 this year, according to the Collective against Islamophobia in France. The number of anti-Muslim actions has sharply risen this year, moreover, since the Kouachi brothers’ terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*.

The goal of such Islamophobic laws is to divide the working class, attack democratic rights, encourage racist and anti-immigrant sentiment, and to push through unpopular policies of austerity and war in France and across Europe. The young high school student is the victim of a sharp turn to the right that has developed over decades in Europe.

The 2004 law was voted amid rising social anger with the anti-working class policies of French President

Jacques Chirac. It was part of a strategy to divert working class opposition to the social crisis and a governmental agenda of cutting pensions, attacking social services, and intensifying police repression. The law was initially put forward as teachers were on strike to defend their pensions and public education spending more broadly.

This attack against Muslims in France encouraged a series of Islamophobic attacks across Europe. Several years ago, a law was voted in Switzerland to ban the construction of minarets. Over the last year in Germany, marches were organized over several weeks by the far-right Pegida movement to oppose Islam in Europe.

For years, the ruling elite in France has encouraged collective hysteria against Islam in order to attack the working class.

In 2009, French President Nicolas Sarkozy launched a debate on “national identity” and a law against wearing the burqa. This law was part of Sarkozy’s strategy of appealing to neo-fascist voters who had voted for Sarkozy in the 2007 presidential elections.

The law against the burqa and the “national identity” debate provided political cover for the French ruling elite to legitimize the neo-fascist National Front over the ensuing years, as well as an escalating series of imperialist wars against Muslim countries. The anti-burqa law in particular encouraged hostility to resistance to NATO’s imperialist occupation of Afghanistan, which was cynically presented as a struggle to defend women’s rights.

The entire political establishment bears responsibility for Islamophobic laws in France. The law against the burqa obtained the support of Manuel Valls, the current Socialist Party (PS) prime minister, and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). PCF deputy André

Gerin presided over the legislative committee that drafted the anti-burqa law. The law also won the support of France's various pseudo-left parties, from the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to the Independent Workers Party (POI).

By supporting laws targeting Muslims, these parties of the affluent middle class demonstrate their hostility to democratic rights and to the struggle to unify the working class.

The 2004 law against the veil has encouraged employers to victimize Muslim workers, such as when a Muslim worker was fired for wearing a veil at the Baby-Loup day care center.

As for the 2009 anti-burqa law, it has escalated social tensions and police repression in immigrant suburbs across France. A riot broke out in Trappes in 2013, after police violently arrested a woman wearing the veil and then beat and insulted her husband.

It is in this atrocious political atmosphere that a high school student can be expelled for no other reason than claims that her skirt is too long.



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