

After Paris attacks, anti-Muslim riot erupts in Corsica

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On December 25 and 26, the French Mediterranean Island of Corsica saw anti-Muslim riots as protesters attacked a local Muslim prayer hall in the capital, Ajaccio, ransacked it, and burned prayer books, including copies of the Koran. After the riot, local authorities ordered a ban on all protests and gatherings until January 4.

The riot broke out after two firefighters and a policeman were attacked by several hooded men on Christmas eve in the poor neighborhood of Jardins de l'Empereur, home to some 1,700 people, half of them of non-French origin. A firefighter told French television that about 20 people armed with iron bars and baseball bats had tried to attack them, but were unable to smash through the windows of their truck.

Regional official Francois Lalanne said a fire had been deliberately lit in the neighbourhood in a ruse aimed at "ambushing" the emergency services.

On Christmas day, before the identity of the attackers had been established, a group of some 600 protesters took to the streets in Ajaccio, chanting "Arabs get out" and "This is our home." They attacked the Muslim prayer room and vandalised a kebab shop.

It remains unclear who were behind the attack on firefighters. Two men in their 20s were held in custody as part of a probe into the unrest.

"Their involvement in the attack against the firefighters is still under investigation," said prosecutor Eric Bouillard, adding the men had had brushes with authorities in the past.

The anti-Muslim riots are the product of the incitement of Islamophobic sentiment by the entire political establishment, including the imposition of bans on the headscarf and the burqa. Above all, it took place in the hysterical atmosphere created by the state of emergency imposed by the Socialist Party (PS)

government after the November 13 terrorist attack.

Under the state of emergency, the government has banned protests, cracked down on those that proceeded in defiance of the ban, and carried out mass arrests. The PS is preparing a constitutional amendment to extend the state of emergency indefinitely and allow police to search and detain anyone police view as a potential threat to public order.

In addition to a constitutional amendment allowing for a permanent state of emergency, the PS has also proposed a constitutional amendment to revoke the French nationality of all bi-nationals convicted of terrorism.

The measure is primarily directed at Muslims, as a large majority of France's dual nationals trace their origins to France's former colonies in Africa. By moving to revoke the citizenship of dual nationals, the PS is solidarising with the neo-Fascist National Front (FN), the main proponent of stripping French nationality obtained by immigrants.

The measures advocated by the PS harken back to the Occupation, when the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime in the 1940s pronounced collective deprivations of French nationality aimed at the Jewish population, who were targeted for mass murder.

By employing reactionary anti-democratic measures, the PS is seeking to transform France into a police state amidst a deepening social crisis, creating a condition for the far-right FN.

The anti-Muslim riot came after the FN made significant electoral gains in the recent regional elections earlier in December, tripling the number of FN counselors in many regions. In Corsica, Corsican nationalists gained an unexpected victory.

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The FN condemned the attack on firefighters on December 24, calling for tough measures, and struck a conciliatory note towards the anti-Muslim riot. It wrote, “When citizens legitimately feel that the state no longer makes Republican order reign, when they see firemen and policemen ambushed in France’s innumerable ghettos, there is evidently a risk that they will want to mete out justice themselves, with the violence that unfortunately results.”

Having encouraged anti-Muslim hatreds, the PS government made a hypocritical criticism of the riot. While denouncing “the intolerable aggression of the firemen,” Prime Minister Manuel Valls also criticised “the unacceptable violation of a site for Muslim prayer.”

For his part, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said the riots were “intolerable attacks with overtones of racism and xenophobia.”

As a result of anti-Muslim prejudice, there have been an increasing number of anti-Muslim protests and racist incidents since the terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris this January.

In July, the National Observatory Against Islamophobia reported, “France, which has the largest Muslim community in Europe, with some 5 million members, saw 274 anti-Muslim acts or threats in the first semester of 2015.”

This figure represented a 281 percent increased compared to the same period in 2014, during which 72 anti-Muslim acts were listed.



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