

Charlie Hebdo joins racist campaign against refugees in Europe

Alex Lantier
16 January 2016

With a foul attack on Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old boy whose drowning last year off the coast of Turkey became a symbol of the terrible human costs of the war in Syria, France's satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* joined the growing racist campaign against Middle East refugees in Europe.

The cartoon, which has shocked readers around the world, was drawn by Riss, a cartoonist who survived last January's terror attack on the magazine's editorial board. It exploited the hysterical campaign now being whipped up in the international media around claims that refugees joined in a wave of alleged sexual assaults in the German city of Cologne, on New Year's Eve.

Under a caption asking, "What would little Aylan have become had he grown up?" Riss drew a series of caricatures of a drowned boy getting up, getting larger as he grows up, acquiring a pig-like snout, and running after a frightened blonde woman, and answered: "A groper in Germany."

The blatant appeal to racism and anti-Muslim prejudices, which would not have been out of place in the pages of the Nazi propaganda sheet *Der Stürmer*, drew international condemnation.

Aylan's aunt Tima Kurdi, who is now living as a refugee in Canada, told CBC News that the cartoon was "disgusting," adding: "I hope people respect our family's pain. It's a big loss to us. We're not the same anymore after this tragedy. We're trying to forget a little bit and move on with our life. But to hurt us again, it's not fair."

Even in France, where the Socialist Party (PS) exploited last year's attack to launch a reactionary campaign for national unity around a "war on terror" on the theme of "I am Charlie," ostensibly to defend press freedom, many readers left comments condemning the cartoon.

The quadrupling of *Charlie Hebdo*'s readership to 200,000 due to official promotion after the attacks has repeatedly involved the weekly in scandal as it shocked its

new readers, the right-wing daily *Le Figaro* noted. It wrote: "*Charlie Hebdo*'s readership, previously limited to libertarians used to this type of corrosive and grating humour, has grown to include a broad audience, which is not necessarily used to cynicism."

"I hope that I am not shocking anyone, but *Charlie*'s front-page cartoon is ugly and encourages ugliness," commented one reader on *Le Figaro*'s web site.

Another commentator pointed to the Stalinist, social democratic and libertarian-anarchist sympathies of the weekly's staff, writing, "With a reactionary newspaper run by bourgeois-bohemian communists who give the finger to everything and everyone, we get predictable results: morbid and tasteless cartoons that provoke scandal, sell copy, but also start wars."

Charlie Hebdo's attack on an innocent child, as part of an international campaign to justify mass deportations of refugees by smearing them as rapists, exposes all the organizations that promoted or adapted to the "I am Charlie" campaign: the media in France and other NATO countries, France's PS government, and its various political satellites.

It vindicates the column published shortly after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack by the *World Socialist Web Site*. While unequivocally condemning the terrorist attack on the journalists, by fighters who had trained in the Islamist camps that train foreign Islamist fighters for the imperialist-backed war for regime change in Syria, it warned of the utter political hypocrisy of *Charlie Hebdo*'s promoters.

It opposed media claims that *Charlie Hebdo* represented the best traditions of caricature directed against European monarchs of the 16th to 19th centuries. These earlier caricaturists, the WSWWS wrote, were "representatives of a democratic Enlightenment who directed their scorn against the powerful and corrupt defenders of aristocratic privilege. In its relentlessly degrading portrayals of

Muslims, *Charlie Hebdo* has mocked the poor and the powerless.”

It warned of the reactionary character of the political campaign around the weekly: “It is absurd to claim, by way of defense of *Charlie Hebdo*, that its cartoons are all ‘in good fun’ and have no political consequences. Aside from the fact that the French government is desperate to rally support for its growing military agenda in Africa and the Middle East, France is a country where the influence of the neo-fascist National Front is growing rapidly. In this political context, *Charlie Hebdo* has facilitated the growth of a form of politicized anti-Muslim sentiment that bears a disturbing resemblance to the politicized anti-Semitism that emerged as a mass movement in France in the 1890s.

“In its use of crude and vulgar caricatures that purvey a sinister and stereotyped image of Muslims, *Charlie Hebdo* recalls the cheap racist publications that played a significant role in fostering the anti-Semitic agitation that swept France during the famous Dreyfus Affair, which erupted in 1894 after a Jewish officer was falsely convicted of espionage on behalf of Germany.”

Today, the contradictions between the hypocritical democratic pretensions the PS advanced after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks and its outcome one year later are flagrant. The ensuing year has confirmed the WSWs’s initial warnings about the “I am Charlie” campaign. It saw the spread of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) across France in last year’s regional elections and, after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris, a drive by the PS to install a permanent state of emergency, abrogating fundamental democratic rights and further stoking anti-Muslim sentiment.

Within the PS, moves are afoot to deprive people convicted of terrorism-related offences of French nationality. Significantly, PS officials themselves denounced deprivation of nationality less than two years ago, when it was proposed only a few months before the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. The policy is infamously associated with the French fascist authorities’ deprivation of the nationality of thousands of French Jews during World War II, before they were deported to Nazi death camps in Europe.

After a year of continuous escalation of the “war on terror” and French chauvinism, the “I am Charlie” campaign proved to be the mechanism for legitimizing policies that previously would have been unthinkable. The millions who marched a year ago wearing “I am Charlie” stickers were in the final analysis exploited as extras in a

drive, now well advanced, to install a police state regime in France.

Charlie Hebdo’s attack on Aylan Kurdi shows that the character of the weekly itself was not incidental in the PS’s ability to launch a savage attack on democratic rights under the cover of an “I am Charlie” campaign. The layer of libertarian, bourgeois-bohemian “communists” that dominate its staff, social entourage, and core readership—a privileged middle-class layer that the WSWs has come to call the pseudo-left—has over decades become totally dominated by callous, pro-war, and anti-Muslim sentiments.

The morphing of this layer into a social base for fascistic policies is reflected in the biographies of some of the more prominent surviving personalities associated to *Charlie Hebdo*.

Romain Goupil, a high school student union leader during the 1968 general strike and ex-member of the Pabloite Communist League, a precursor of today’s New Anti-capitalist Party, was a key advisor of comedian Coluche’s 1981 presidential campaign, which *Charlie Hebdo* officially backed. He went on to back NATO wars in Yugoslavia during the 1990, the illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003—which was opposed even by the French government—and the 2011 NATO war in Libya.

Caroline Fourest, a journalist and “pro-secularism” activist who worked at *Charlie Hebdo* and now supports the PS’s deprivation-of-nationality policy, publicly backed the 2010 “Sausage-and-Wine Appetizer at the Goutte d’Or” provocation. This was an operation launched by far-right groups, including the Identity Block and Secular Counterattack, aiming to disturb Muslims at prayer in the working class Goutte d’Or area by drinking wine and eating pork in their vicinity.

Charlie Hebdo’s latest libellous attack on a dead and defenceless boy exemplifies the imperviousness of these forces to democratic sentiments and their hostility to democratic rights.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact