

After brawl in town of Sisco, France launches campaign to ban burkini

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The Socialist Party (PS) mayor of Sisco on the French Mediterranean island of Corsica has banned the “burkini” body-covering swimsuit for Muslim women, after a fight erupted between Corsican villagers and three Muslim families of North African origin.

On Saturday afternoon, local youth were at the beach along with the Muslim families. The fight allegedly erupted when the Muslim men accused a tourist of taking pictures of his wife and threw a stone at the vacationer. Then, according to witnesses, “a Sisco teen recorded on his smart-phone the brawl between the father and the vacationer. He was then himself attacked and hit in the face. He and his friends then called adult villagers for help, and dozens came, there were insults and bottles and stones were thrown.”

The brawl left five people injured, including at least two badly bruised men of North African origin. Four were briefly hospitalized. Three cars belonging to the North African families were torched.

Well before the circumstances of the brawl were established, the French ruling elite seized upon this incident to launch a provocative and reactionary campaign to stoke up anti-Muslim hysteria. On Monday, Sisco mayor Ange-Pierre Vivoni issued a decree prohibiting the wearing of burkini on the beaches of his town. The decree was based on two similar bans, that of the French Riviera towns of Cannes and Villeneuve-Loubet, recently approved by France's administrative court.

The ban was the subject of an extraordinary intervention by national authorities and parties. Speaking to *La Provence*, Prime Minister Manuel Valls (PS) said he would “support” mayors banning the burkini, which he called “incompatible with the values of France,” while Minister for Family, Children and Women's Rights Laurence Rossignol (PS) defended

the bans, stating that the burkini's purpose is “to hide women's bodies in order to better control them.”

The Vice-President of the neo-fascist National Front (FN), Florian Philippot, echoed PS attacks on Muslims. “It's not surprising, when the State does not respond to the actions of scum and Islamist violence,” he said, calling for “a general and absolute ban of the burkini on all French beaches.”

Vivoni imposed his ban based on unsubstantiated allegations that Saturday's incident was caused by women wearing burkinis. He claimed that the ban was necessary to protect the population. In fact, the ban aims neither to protect the population nor to defend women's democratic rights, but to attack democratic rights and encourage racism, orienting to Corsican-nationalist and far-right forces.

Vivoni justified the measure based on arguments from a right-wing protest on Sunday after the incident. Some 500 people gathered on Sunday in areas of Bastia that are home to a large North African community, shouting, “We're going up there, because this is our home.” Citing allegations from a girl at the rally, Vivoni told AFP: “I confirm that women were bathing in burkinis ... [which are] a fashion statement we see on all Corsica's beaches.”

Similarly, last month, the right-wing mayor of Cannes signed a decree denouncing burkinis as an incitement to terrorist violence and a threat to public order and hygiene. It stated, “Beach wear that ostentatiously indicates religious belief, under conditions where France and its religious institutions are targeted by terrorist attacks, threatens to create the risk of troubling public order (gatherings, riots, etc.) that we must prevent.” It imposed a €38 (US\$42.90) fine for wearing a burkini.

Charges that Muslim women exercising their

democratic right to dress as they please are inciting terrorist violence linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militia, and thus hostile to France, are baseless and dangerous lies. The relentless incitement of anti-Muslim sentiment, as the Sisco brawl itself shows, has raised ethnic and sectarian tensions in France to the boiling point.

It is the ruling elites in France and the other NATO powers that have incited Islamist terrorist forces as part of their wars for regime change across the Middle East and Africa. They fomented proxy wars, arming and financing Islamist militias and terrorist groups—first to topple the Libyan regime in 2011, and then to stoke a sectarian civil war in Syria that has claimed over 400,000 lives and forced over 10 million people to flee their homes.

The hypocrisy of the campaign against the burkini is staggering. US media have reported that the CIA is arming Al Qaeda-linked opposition militias near the Syrian city of Aleppo with anti-tank missiles and other high-tech weapons to attack Russian-backed Syrian government forces. Yet it is Muslim beachgoers, not the reckless actions of the NATO imperialist powers that are arming terror groups and threatening to provoke all-out war with Russia, that are denounced as threats.

Burkini bans are fundamentally opposed to secular principles and violate basic democratic rights. The European Convention on Human Rights' Article 9 on religious freedom states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance."

The burkini ban is the outcome of over a decade of escalating attacks on Muslims' democratic rights in France. The conservative government of President Jacques Chirac imposed a headscarf ban in public schools in 2004, followed by a burqa ban introduced by right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy. These bans were supported by pseudo-left groups, including the New Anticapitalist Party, who then backed the imperialist wars in Libya and Syria as well as the lifestyle justifications for anti-Muslim hatreds such as the headscarf and burqa bans.

The current allegations that Muslim swimwear

marketed by major clothing stores in Europe incites terrorism underscore the absurd and fraudulent character of these assaults on democratic rights, which have fanned reactionary, pro-FN sentiments in France.

"Since when did wearing a burkini, in most cases a loose fitting nylon version of a wetsuit, become an act of allegiance to terrorist movements?" Huda Jawad asked in the British *Independent*. "Do Marks & Spencer or House of Fraser know that their attempt to raise profits and exploit a gap in the over-saturated clothing market is selling and promoting allegiance to ISIS?"

The anti-burkini hysteria is aimed above all at the working class, and rising opposition to policies of war and social austerity imposed by the European Union and France's PS government.

The European bourgeoisie is seizing on recent terrorist atrocities, like last year's *Charlie Hebdo* and November 13 attacks in Paris and the March 22 Brussels attack—all carried out by forces known to European intelligence services—to impose police-state measures and authoritarian forms of rule. French President François Hollande imposed a state of emergency suspending basic democratic rights, and promoted policies associated to the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime, such as stripping French nationality from those supposedly linked to terrorism.

The French state of emergency was used principally to justify cracking down on and trying to ban this spring's protests against the draconian attacks on social conditions contained in the PS government's wildly unpopular labor law.

The only way forward for class-conscious workers is to oppose the bourgeoisie's attempts to divide the working class along religious and racial lines with reactionary policies such as burkini bans.



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