

Amid state censorship campaign, French media denounce “conspiracy theories”

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After French President Emmanuel Macron announced a bill targeting “fake news” on the Internet and social media, the French press has launched a campaign against “conspiracy theories” that it complains are popular in France. The daily *Libération* devoted its entire front page to the issue. In an article titled “French people believe in conspiracy theories but this is not a conspiracy,” it writes that according to an Ifop poll for the Jean Jaurès Foundation and the Conspiracy Watch group, 79 percent of the French people believe in at least one popular conspiracy theory.

This denunciation of the population—which tends to support reactionary arguments that the mainstream media should help censor “fake news” that gullible readers might find online—is anything but politically innocent. It takes place amid an escalating campaign, led by Washington and the major technology corporations including Facebook and Google, to censor the Internet. For months, Google has been cutting down the visibility of socialist and antiwar web sites, including the *World Socialist Web Site*. It has openly proclaimed that it is censoring Russian state media.

As for Facebook, its CEO Mark Zuckerberg has announced an initiative to limit the number of news articles published on Facebook in order to promote “personal moments” on social media.

An examination of the press campaign against the French people’s alleged “conspiracy mania” proves one key point: what drives this campaign is not the desire to better inform the public, but to muzzle the Internet in order to strangle rising social and political opposition.

Libération focuses to a very large extent on the population’s views about Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (IS), and terror attacks in France. It denounces as conspiracy theories the idea that IS and Al Qaeda are

“in fact manipulated by Western intelligence agencies,” or the fact that “somewhat more than a fifth of the French population has doubts about the official account” of the 2015 terror attack against *Charlie Hebdo* magazine.

The questionnaire cited by *Libération* pours scorn on these ideas, comparing them with the fact that, supposedly, 9 percent of French people believe the Earth is flat. However, such views are not absurd ideas, but contentions confirmed by a wide array of supporting evidence reported in official media.

The historic ties between the CIA and Al Qaeda are well known. Al Qaeda emerged during the CIA’s secret war in Afghanistan—first against the pro-Soviet regime in 1979 and then the Soviet army after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It was Zbigniew Brzezinski, the US National Security Advisor at the time, who confirmed it subsequently in 1997, in an interview in France with *Le Nouvel Observateur* (since renamed *L’Obs*).

In the 2010s, the CIA helped mobilize and arm the descendants of Al Qaeda, like IS and Al Nusra, which were initially promoted as democratic “rebels” fighting the Syrian regime. In its 2013 article “Arms Airlift to Syria Rebels Expands, With Aid From CIA,” the *New York Times* wrote, “With help from the C.I.A., Arab governments and Turkey have sharply increased their military aid to Syria’s opposition fighters in recent months, expanding a secret airlift of arms and equipment for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries and the accounts of rebel commanders.”

In France, the Islamist networks used by NATO to organize its proxy war in Syria—from which came the Kouachi brothers and Amédy Coulibaly, who carried

out the attacks against *Charlie Hebdo*— benefited from the tacit support of the police and intelligence agencies. They were allowed to freely travel across Europe to recruit networks of fighters, arm themselves, and prepare terror attacks against the Assad regime.

Libération angrily adds that concerning the *Charlie Hebdo* attack on “7 January 2015, shortly after the Kouachi brothers’ attack against the satirical weekly’s editorial board, an incalculable number of conspiracy theories challenging the information provided by the police and media spread online, as average Internet users tried to act as investigators or self-styled journalists.”

Again, however, reports drawn from the most established bourgeois media refute the official account that the *Charlie Hebdo* attack was an unpredictable event carried out by a few “lone wolves” who had totally escaped the attention of the intelligence services.

A year and half after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack, *Le Monde* published a report based on notes from the General Directorate of Internal Security (DGSI) that the Kouachi brothers were members of Al Qaeda in Yemen and linked to Coulibaly. The Kouachi brothers had been followed intensely by the intelligence services, who considered them extremely dangerous, for several years before the surveillance was suddenly called off for no apparent reason.

The links between this attack, the state machine, and neo-fascist circles are also well documented. *La Voix du Nord* and *Libération* itself reported the arrest in July 2016 of arms dealer Claude Hermant, a former National Front (FN) operative and police informant, whose company provided the weapons that were used in the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

Médiapart has reported that as early as 14 January 2015, Slovak intelligence and Europol apparently informed French authorities that Coulibaly’s weapons had passed through the hands of Hermant’s company.

These revelations are not “fake news” concocted by obscure web sites. What is taking place is this: the media are now falsifying events and cover up their previous reporting, in order to avoid discrediting political lies which the ruling elites across Europe used to justify carrying out reactionary and unpopular police-state measures based on false pretenses.

Terror attacks by Al Qaeda and IS in France and across Europe provided a pretext for the ruling class to

impose stepped-up police-state measures like the French state of emergency.

As states across Europe oversaw a broad media campaign to incite suspicion and paranoia towards Muslims, the French government was able to use the state of emergency to violently repress protests against its deeply unpopular labor law. In this, it had the support of an entire series of reactionary, petty bourgeois pseudo left parties, like the New Anticapitalist Party. These forces had previously created even more confusion by promoting the CIA-backed militias fighting for regime change in Libya and Syria as tools of a democratic revolution.

Now employers across France are using the labor law, completed by Macron’s labor decrees, to prepare job and wage cuts in numerous industries.

This entire policy was based on political lies concocted by the ruling class about Islamism and IS, claiming that the only way to fight the supposedly unprecedented and incomprehensible terror threat was to give vast police powers to the state.

Now, the French media and ruling elite fear that growing awareness of the links between the intelligence services and the Islamist terror groups could bring down the entire edifice of lies on which they built their reactionary policies.

In its article, *Libération* underscores the danger, from its standpoint, that popular mistrust of the “war on terror” and of NATO imperialist wars will provoke even deeper hatred of the traditional ruling parties. It writes, “Effectively, conspiracy theories can be a powerful tool for indoctrination carried out by radical far-left or far-right organizations.”

Social opposition cannot, however, find any progressive expression in the rise of petty-bourgeois parties like the NPA, nor of more explicitly right-wing parties. The critical task is the building of an international movement of the working class against war, austerity and censorship.



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