

Trial of the November 2015 French terrorist attacks opens in Paris

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The trial of the November 13, 2015 Paris terrorist attacks opened in a special criminal court in the French capital on September 8.

The attacks, which killed 130 people and injured 350 in Paris and the surrounding suburb of Saint-Denis, are yet another demonstration of the bankrupt and reactionary character of terrorism. Those responsible for the attacks are guilty of mass murder. Marxists have always insisted that nothing socially progressive could emerge from the indiscriminate and arbitrary annihilation of human lives, which disorients the working class and undermines popular opposition to police state measures.

For almost a month, the relatives of the victims have been taking the stand to recall the events of the attacks. Their tragic and genuine sentiments contrast sharply with the hypocrisy of the prosecution's arguments and the media propaganda surrounding the trial, which is silent on the war waged by France and the other NATO powers in Syria.

Nonetheless, there is an indissoluble link between the "war on terror" and the state of emergency imposed after the attacks of November 13, 2015, on the one hand, and the French and NATO intervention in Syria and Libya since 2011, on the other hand. These wars have cost more than 400,000 lives and forced more than 10 million people to flee their homes, leaving behind devastated societies.

Indeed, to wage wars in these two countries, the NATO powers used the same Islamist networks that committed the Paris attacks. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria soon emerged as the most powerful "rebel" militia and thus the most likely to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Already in August 2012, US officials had confessed that among the Syrian rebel forces supported by NATO were members of al-Qaeda,

the network that committed the 9/11 attacks.

The political hollowness of the trial is seen in the fact that none of the officials from the NATO countries who carried out this policy will be questioned, let alone placed in the dock.

The trial, the largest criminal hearing ever held in France, will last nine months. Twenty defendants are being tried, including Salah Abdeslam, 31 years old, the only survivor of the Islamic State (IS) cell that carried out the attacks. The prosecution dossier makes up 542 volumes, or one million pages. Nearly 1,800 civil parties, including relatives of victims and survivors, are expected to testify in the trial. At least 145 days of hearings are planned.

Of the 20 defendants, 14 are present, including 11 already detained. Six more are being tried in absentia, five of them presumed dead, including the French jihadist brothers Fabien and Jean-Michel Clain, who were allegedly killed in February or March 2019 in an air strike in Syria. Fabien Clain is believed to be the man who recorded the audio message claiming responsibility for the November 13 attacks.

During the hearing, the main accused, Abdeslam, coldly justified the attacks by citing the French bombing against the Islamic State. "We attacked France, targeted the civilian population, but it was nothing personal," he said. "The goal is not to stir the pot but to be sincere," he added, assuring that the attacks were a response to "French bombings on the Islamic State" in Syria.

When in 2014 the Islamic State intervened militarily in Iraq against the pro-Iranian neo-colonial regime built by the US occupation of that country between 2003 and 2011, a conflict emerged between the Islamic State and the imperialist powers. The compromise between French imperialism and the Islamic State, which served

as its conduit in Syria and was thus financed for these purposes by corporate giants like Lafarge, collapsed.

The United States and its allies reacted with alarm to the Islamic State's capture of many cities in Iraq, including Mosul. They attempted to isolate IS in Syria, mobilizing other jihadist forces, including the Al Nusra Front, against Assad, and to crush the IS advance in Iraq. When NATO launched attacks against the Islamists in Iraq, it angered the IS, which felt betrayed. In retaliation, the IS planned to commit attacks on European soil, under the illusion that terrorist acts would force French imperialism to change its policy.

“Francois Hollande said we fought France because of its values, but that is a lie,” Abdeslam added, denouncing the “French planes that bombed the Islamic State, men, women, children. ... Francois Hollande knew the risks he was taking by attacking the Islamic State in Syria.”

Yet, while concentrated on utilising the Islamists for their geostrategic goals in the Middle East, European states responded to the threat posed by these same networks inside Europe only with police measures targeting democratic rights and legitimizing neo-fascism.

It is an established fact that several terrorists who committed terrorist attacks in Paris were known to European and American intelligence services. In the aftermath of the attacks, many media outlets revealed that most of the Islamists involved in the Paris suicide attacks, including their alleged organizer, were known to French and Belgian security services long before November 13, 2015. But no intelligence or police service took steps to prevent them from unleashing their murderous violence.

The United States, Turkey and Iraq all warned France before November 13 that plots were afoot; Turkey provided the name of one of the men involved, Ismael Omar Mostefai, known to French authorities since 2010. Mostefai was able to travel to Syria in 2013, despite being included on an official terrorist watch-list flagging him as a security risk, and then return to France in 2014. He was one of the attackers who massacred nearly 100 people at the Bataclan in Paris before committing suicide.

After the attacks, the PS government of President François Hollande carried out an unprecedented series of attacks on democratic rights. It declared a state of

emergency and mobilized more than 100,000 security forces across the country, greatly increasing the powers of the police and the army. Hollande proposed amending the French constitution to constitutionalize the state of emergency, a measure of dubious legality imposed during the Algerian war in 1955, and the ability of the state to strip the nationality from individuals, a measure previously used to repress members of the Resistance to Nazism.

These attacks on democratic rights have gone hand in hand with the intensification of wars in Africa and the Middle East, under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

The trial will not resolve any of the questions raised by the attacks of November 13, 2015. Since then, the entire political establishment has moved rapidly towards dictatorship and the legitimisation of the far right. Under the pretext of creating “national unity,” Hollande officially invited the president of the far-right Rassemblement National (RN), Marine Le Pen, to the Élysée Palace.

Elected in 2017, Macron intensified these attacks on democratic rights. He mobilized the police to repress the “yellow vest” protests against social inequality. He imposed a charter of principles on the French Islamic council and enacted an “anti-separatist law” which, under the cover of combating “Islamist separatism,” sought to prevent Muslim criticism of French imperialism's predatory wars. The task of fighting the fascist drift of the ruling elite falls to the working class, mobilized on an anti-war, internationalist and socialist perspective.



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