

The attack on *Leman* magazine: A dangerous provocation

Bar?? Demir, Ula? Ate?çi
1 July 2025

On Monday evening in Istanbul, a mob of Islamists and fascists stormed the Taksim office of the weekly humor magazine *Leman* on the pretext of a cartoon. In full view of the police, the attackers shouted death threats for hours and chanted slogans of Sharia against secularism.

Following the targeting of a cartoon published in *Leman* magazine on June 26, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation and issued a detention warrant against the cartoonist, two executive editors and the editor-in-chief on charges of "publicly insulting religious values". The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office announced that the issue of the magazine has been ordered to be confiscated and that an effort has been launched to block access to *Leman*'s social media accounts.

In the evening, as the provocation in front of the magazine building continued, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya shared videos on his X/Twitter account showing four magazine employees being violently detained by the police. The employees were handcuffed behind their backs and made to walk barefoot in a manner resembling torture.

In his post announcing the cartoonist's detention, the minister said that the judiciary had already delivered its verdict: "I once again condemn those who try to sow seeds of discord by caricaturing our Prophet (PBUH). The individual named as D.P., who created this offensive drawing, has been captured and detained. I reiterate: These scoundrels will be held accountable by the law."

The cartoon depicts two winged figures, Mohammed and Moses, greeting each other over a bombed city, saying, "Salaam alaikum [Peace be upon you], I am Mohammed!" and "aleichem shalom [peace be upon you], I am Moses...".

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) opposes the far-right provocation and aggression, provoked by the false allegation of insulting the prophet Mohammed and condoned by the police forces, and demands the release of those detained.

During the organised attack in Taksim Square, closed to May Day celebrations by the working class and the site of violent police attacks on peaceful protests by leftist dissidents, a man identified as the Istanbul provincial head of the "Great Eastern Raiders", an organisation allegedly linked to the Islamist IBDA-

C which is considered a "terrorist organisation" in Turkey, made the following threat: "This is Muslim Anatolian soil. Everyone should remember this: Either we will leave, or they will leave. Either they will die or we will die... We are ready to take lives!"

In one video, a member of the crowd boasted to the police that he had taken part in the raid on the magazine building, but was not detained for making this confession.

Later, the magazine's Bak?rköy venue was also attacked. Paving stones were thrown at the venue's windows and the police intervened by firing shots in the air.

The Beyo?lu District Governor's Office announced a one-day ban on all events, including meetings, demonstrations, press statements, leaflet distributions and sit-ins, within the district on Tuesday.

Leman magazine made a statement on X/Twitter in the evening while the attacks were going on, saying, "THIS CARICATURE IS NOT A HZ. MUHAMMED (PBUH) CARICATURE. In the work, the name of a Muslim slaughtered in Israeli bombardments is fictionalized as Muhammad. More than 200 million people in the Islamic world are named Muhammad. There is no reference to the Prophet Muhammad in the work."

The magazine added the following: "We invite our protesting brothers and sisters to understand us correctly. As a magazine with 5 Palestine Special Issues and hundreds of covers including the Mavi Marmara event, we state that you do not have the right to question our conscience and beliefs in a false and distorted way. Again, we apologize to our well-meaning readers who we think have been exposed to provocations and hurt."

The provocation in Taksim occurred one day before the 32nd anniversary of the 2 July 1993 massacre, in which 33 intellectuals and two hotel workers were burned to death by a Shariaist mob at the Mad?mak Hotel in Sivas, in front of police and soldiers. The IBDA-C is alleged to have played a role in this massacre, which was largely covered up.

As the far-right Islamist mob gathered in Taksim and on social media again demanded "burning the building" and "taking lives", the authorities focused on escalating the situation and exploiting it for their own interests, not on

stopping the illegal demonstration and detaining the provocateurs.

Minister of Justice Y?lmaz Tunç said, “Disrespect towards our beliefs is never acceptable. A judicial investigation has been initiated... on the charge of ‘publicly insulting religious values’ regarding the drawing of a cartoon of the Prophet by a humor magazine.”

Presidential Communications Director Fahrettin Altun said, “The immoral drawing of the Holy Prophet Muhammad in *Leman* is an unacceptable provocation! All units of our state are taking the necessary action against this ugly attack on our beliefs and values.”

Istanbul Governor Davut Gül stated on his social media account: “These ugly attacks are never ideas or humor, but conscious and systematic provocations that directly target our beliefs. Our state is resolutely carrying out legal processes.”

Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem ?mamo?lu, the Republican People’s Party’s (CHP) presidential candidate who was arrested in March, has joined the chorus. Imamoglu stated on his X/Twitter account Tuesday: “I condemn the insolence against our Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was sent as mercy to the worlds and Prophet Moses (PBUH). Although it is stated that the cartoon was intended to draw attention to the persecution in Gaza, the method used has broken the hearts of people of faith and created a deep sensitivity.”

CHP leader Özgür Özel’s reaction was different from ?mamo?lu’s: “When I look at [the cartoon], I see an angel who lost his life under bombardment in Gaza, with a halo on his head, with a wing. He encounters another angel who was killed by another bomb.” Pointing out that there was no disrespect, Özel said, “I will not allow any disrespect to the Prophet Muhammad, but I will not allow lynching based on a disrespect that does not exist.”

Devlet Bahçeli, leader of Erdoğan’s fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), inaccurately tried to equate the *Leman* cartoon with the provocative Charlie Hebdo cartoons that insulted the Prophet Muhammad and the religion of Islam.

Erdoğan echoed the line of government officials in a statement on Tuesday: “The insult to the Prophet Muhammad by some immoral people who lack the values of this nation and do not know decency and manners is unacceptable. It is a blatant provocation, a despicable provocation in the guise of humor.”

The official enabling of the dangerous provocation in Taksim and the subsequent use of the incident to exploit the religious sentiments of the people points to the depth of the crisis the government is in. Faced with a massive protest movement defending democratic rights following the arrest of Imamoglu, who polls show is likely to win the presidential election, the Erdoğan government is simultaneously confronted with a growing movement of the working class in the midst of a worsening social and economic crisis.

Workers should take this provocation as a warning. In this environment, the ruling class and the capitalist political establishment will try to exploit any opportunity to suppress the deepening political crisis and divert attention away from the mounting class tensions.

Already 600,000 public sector workers are locked in a struggle over the government’s below-inflation wage increase offer. Millions of minimum wage earners are demanding a pay rise, while discontent is growing among other sections of the working class. At the same time, Erdoğan is preparing to increase military spending from 2 to 5 percent of GDP, in line with the decision of the last NATO summit, and is imposing a severe austerity program.

The mask of “defending Islamic values” was also seen as an opportunity to cover up the government’s complicity in Israel’s genocide in Gaza and the US wars in the Middle East. Despite the rhetoric of defending the Muslim oppressed, the governments led by Erdoğan have, since 2002, aided US imperialist aggression in its quest for domination over the Middle East.

The Erdoğan government, along with its predecessors, is deeply implicated in the wars of imperialist aggression that, over the last thirty-five years, have turned the predominantly Muslim Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa into a bloodbath, killing and displacing millions of people. Erdoğan supported the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, sent troops to Afghanistan and backed the wars of regime change in Libya and Syria.

The government has supported the ongoing genocide of the Zionist Israeli regime in Gaza with US-NATO backing. As of 2024, Turkey is the fifth largest exporter to Israel. By mediating the shipment of Azerbaijani oil to Israel via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Turkey is an accomplice in the genocide of Palestinians, feeding Israel’s war machine.

While the US government, together with its attack dog Israel, is now trying to reshape the Middle East by attacking Iran and targeting anti-genocide students at home, Erdoğan, far from directly criticizing his “friend” Trump, proudly speaks of his cooperation with him. In fact, these two leaders are inspired by each other in the construction of authoritarian regimes in their respective countries.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu calls on workers and youth to oppose reactionary provocations and attacks and to unite the struggle for democratic and social rights with the struggle against imperialist war and Erdoğan’s authoritarian regime.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact