

From Britain: Solidarity with Charlie Hebdo staff

Friday 9 January 2015, by [KELLOWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 7 January 2015).

I lived near where the attack took place and, as an avid reader of *Charlie Hebdo* during my five years there, I felt sick in the stomach when I heard the news today coming out of Paris. Two of the slain cartoonists, Cabu and Wolinski, were very familiar to me, and their pieces were picked up and used by the left and progressive publications all the time. They were justly recognized as some of the most talented and original satirical cartoonists, not just in France, but internationally.

The magazine has always been very secular. It is a trenchant critic of all religions and any other beliefs they wanted to poke fun at. After the May '68 events, it became very popular indeed. In subsequent decades, its fortunes and circulation went up and down. It became less clearly aligned on the left, but could still be defined as progressive insofar as its main targets were bourgeois politicians and reactionary ideologies. The magazine defended women's rights, while some of its portrayal of women was controversial. It courted danger the moment it maintained a position of supporting the right of a Danish magazine to publish satirical cartoons of the prophet Mohammed. There was a bomb attack in 2011 and frequent threats. Its current issue has a front page on the newly published book *Soumission* by Michel Houellebecq, which is provocative and reactionary, stoking up fears of an Islamization of France. Some critics see *Charlie Hebdo's* principled defense of total secularism slipping into a stimulus to a certain islamophobia.

Already on Facebook and elsewhere, some left-wing people are using similar arguments to the ones we heard around the time of the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*—i.e., that the magazine sort of had it coming to it for its virulent secularism and its supposed Islamophobia. Even if you accept that there was a degree of Islamophobia, or at least an accommodation to those people promoting it, there is still no justification for such extreme violence to be unleashed on it. These people were journalists and cartoonists, using images and words, they carried no guns, and they lampooned the Catholic Church mercilessly, too.

People have to accept that these currents of Islamist terrorism—like the ISIS—are not just constructs of imperialism, whose actions are primarily consequences of it. They have a distinct, autonomous history that goes back to the Wahhabi tradition in Saudi Arabia and intersects with the theocratic notions of the Iranian regime. Yes, the legacy of imperialism provides fertile conditions for their growth, but political actors have choices. Before Khomeini, the dominant focus of people fighting for change and against imperialism was Nasserist and Marxist—exemplified by the PLO currents at the time of Arafat. Imperialism was just as strong and aggressive then as it is now.

Neither should the old maxim of “the main enemy is at home” blind us to the necessity of politically confronting the crimes against humanity of these Islamist currents. Indeed, our chances of building support for a socialist alternative to Labour depends partly on us having credible positions on these sorts of issues. Mealy-mouthed formulations, “excuses” or justifications just make it even more difficult to win people to our ideas.

Clearly these terrible events will be grist to the mill of the growing Islamophobic fervor being cultivated by right wing and fascist forces in Europe. We have seen the actions of groups in Dresden,

in France around the Front National, in Italy with Salvini's Northern League, and in the UK with Farage's UKIP. No doubt the mainstream media will amplify all these reactionary responses to the events.

Consequently, people who believe in defending democratic rights have to condemn both these Islamist terrorists and the role of imperialist terror, too. Socialists should work with all forces who want to develop an anti-racist coalition to stop attempts to use these events to further build anti-Islamic hysteria. A communiqué released by the New Anticapitalist Party in France expresses these ideas very coherently [1].

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P.S.

* From Socialist Resistance:

<http://socialistresistance.org/7019/solidarity-with-charlie-hebdo>

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Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 34036), [France: barbaric and reactionary massacre against Charlie Hebdo, full solidarity with the victims, anger and indignation but no to political "national unity"](#).