

Paris, November 13: Your wars, our dead

Sunday 15 November 2015, by [SALINGUE Julien](#) (Date first published: 14 November 2015).

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Socialist Worker

FRAGMENTS.

Those who died last night are ours.

In a restaurant terrace, in a bar, in the street, in a concert hall.

Ours.

Dead because the murderers decided to strike in the middle of Paris and shoot into a crowd with the aim of creating as many victims as possible.

11:30 p.m. Sarkozy appears on TV to declare: "We are at war."

For once, I agree with him. They are at war.

You are at war, you Sarkozys, Hollandes, Valls, Camerons, Netanyahus, Obamas. You are at war, you and your political allies, you and the your friends who own the multinationals.

And you have dragged us in as well, without even asking for our opinion.

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria...The number of us who have protested hasn't always been very large. We haven't succeeded in convincing enough people that these military expeditions only ever bring more instability, violence and tragedy.

Over there, and right here.

Because the war did not start last night. It did not begin in January with the killings at Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Cacher kosher deli.

In January, I wrote the following [see below the full article]:

"One of the causes for the shock hitting large sections of the population, including circles of left-wing activists, is the (re)discovery of this truth: Yes, France is at war. A war which does not always speak its name, a war which is not discussed in the governmental assemblies or in the media, and is

generally not talked about in the public arena, a war against enemies who are not often identified, an asymmetric war—but a war all the same. The recent killings, in the most brutal way, brought this to light for those who did not know, or those who refused to see, or those who had forgotten. France is at war, war creates casualties, and these casualties do not always only fall in your enemy's home.

With whom is France at war? According to various discourses and the media, it is at war against "international terrorism," against "jihadism," against "fundamentalist barbarism," etc. I won't discuss these imprecise labels and the abusive generalizations they imply, nor the paradoxes that underlie them (alliances based on an unstable geometry, support for regimes that support the development of "jihadist" currents, participation in military interventions that reinforce these currents, etc.). It is enough to underline that France has, in reality, followed the lead of George W. Bush and the United States after September 11, 2001, in the rhetoric and politics of the "clash of civilizations," even if not always saying so out loud.

France has been at war for almost 14 years without saying so."

I find no reason to change a single line of this extract. In doing so, I mean no disrespect to the victims or their relatives.

All the emotion, the indignation, the pain, these are all self-evidently legitimate. And the actions of the murderers who last night wrecked hundreds of lives, thousands of lives, are inexcusable.

MIDNIGHT.

ISIS claims responsibility. Apparently, they are at war as well.

According to the Agence France-Presse, citing a witness in the Bataclan theater, one of the killers shouted, "It is Hollande's fault, it is your president's fault, he shouldn't have intervened in Syria."

One can always close one's eyes and shut one's ears. One can become lost in the smoke of the depoliticizing rhetoric of "blind terrorism" as an inexplicable force.

But the killers in Paris are not poor "fools" who bear no responsibility for their actions, nor are they manipulated by some I-don't-know-which-secret-service. We'll know more in the hours and days to come, but there is no doubt the killers will have a profile and a message roughly similar to that of Said and Cherif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly, who carried out the January attacks, about which I wrote the following last January:

"The killers themselves have a discourse (see their interviews and videos, in which they speak about Syria and Iraq, the offenses suffered by Muslims at the hands of France and in the world in general, etc.); they have their own theory (especially note the article published by Mediapart); they have their own organizational reference points (Islamic State, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula)...

They believe, rationally, that they are at war with a certain France, and that they consider, rationally, themselves to be engaged in a legitimate defense. See this statement that Coulibaly gave in a posthumous video:

You attack the Caliphate, you attack the Islamic State, so we attack you. You can't attack and expect nothing in return."

Yes, ISIS is engaged in politics. They are killers, but they are political.

And last night they struck powerfully, very powerfully.

Blindly? Yes and no.

Yes, because they targeted people who are not directly involved in this war, people whose only crime was to be in the wrong spot at the wrong time, people who might have been elsewhere and so would still be among us today.

No, because in striking in such a way, they are sending a message: "Your country is at war with us, and as long as this war continues, none among you will be safe."

This is politics. It is detestable, but it is political.

We live in a world at war. Russia, France and the United States are bombing Syria. Saudi Arabia is bombing Yemen. The French "operations" continue in Mali. Obama just announced that U.S. troops will not be leaving Afghanistan.

According to the UN High Commission on Refugees, there have never been more refugees and internally displaced persons than there are today and there is no reason to believe things will improve any time soon.

THE TOTAL, as of this moment, is 128 dead. 128 is too many.

128 dead on November 13, 2015.

That's about the average number of people killed everyday in Syria since March 2011.

Yes, nearly the daily average: 250,000 dead since March 2011, about 4,500 deaths per month, nearly 150 dead every day.

This might explain some things to a compatriot who says he does not understand why Syrians have been fleeing to Europe for more than four and a half years. There is a November 13 every day in Syria. And it is Assad, your new ally, who bears primary responsibility for this, having brutally suppressed a peaceful uprising.

We live in a world at war. And this allows some people to conduct business.

Arms sales: 2015, a record year for France

France congratulates itself on selling war machines to Egypt. France congratulates itself on selling war machines to Saudi Arabia. France congratulates itself on selling war machines to the United Arab Emirates.

Yet France is surprised, indignant, protesting against becoming a target itself.

Hypocrisy. Cowardice. Lies.

They have released the hounds, foaming at the mouth.

Laurent Wauquiez, who served as Sarkozy's Minister of Higher Education, tweeted "I demand 4,000 people suspected of terrorism be placed in internment centers #AttaquesParis"

Lionnel Luca, conservative member of the National Assembly, tweeted "Tonight Paris is Beirut. The logic of a count on the path to Lebanonization. We will pay dearly for our cowardice faced with communitarianism."

Philippe de Villiers, conservative French member of European Parliament, tweeted "Terrible drama in Paris, this is where laxity and the mosque-ification of France has led."

We must remember these statements.

Returning to what I wrote in January:

Any repressive, stigmatizing or blind response to the economic, political and social realities of France in 2015 is not only doomed to failure but, more importantly, will be merely another step toward new killings tomorrow.

So here we are. Tomorrow turned out to be last night.

1 A.M. Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the first secretary of Hollande's Socialist Party, announces that "France has just suffered an act of war."

They keep saying, keep repeating, that France is at war. But when they say this, they mean to emphasize that "we are at war." A "we" in which they want to implicate us.

No. Fourteen years of your war have only brought more violence, tragedy and new wars to the four corners of the globe.

If Iraq had not been razed, ISIS would not exist.

The great 19th century French poet Paul Valéry once wrote, "War: a massacre of people who don't know each other for the profit of people who know each other but don't massacre each other."

He was right.

It's always the same people who burn.

And if we want it to stop, then once the shock wears off, we must do everything to stop this headlong rush towards generalized barbarism.

It's not too late. There is still time to do something different. Radically different.

We can refuse their injunction: "With us or with the terrorists."

We can refuse the calls for unity with the torturers and warmongers who are day by day building a more barbaric world.

We can refuse their world based on exploitation, robbery, violence, injustice, inequality and misery; instead, we will come together with those with whom we should unite.

Fight for another world, a world that is not only possible, but more necessary than ever.

Keep our heads and don't give in to emotional pressure and shock.

You may accuse me of being a dreamer. But my dreams never killed anyone in contrast to your "pragmatism."

More than ever, we must "resist the irresistible." That's the only way to move ahead.

So...No, Cambadélis. No, Sarkozy. No, Hollande. "We" are not at war.

It is not my war, it is not our war. It is your war.

And once more, they are our dead. Just like Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, Egypt two weeks ago, Beirut this week.

And everywhere else you sow your terror.

Your wars, our dead.

Your war, no more.

Julien Salingue

What is responsible for Paris?

January 19, 2015

THE KILLINGS at *Charlie Hebdo* and the Porte de Vincennes should not prevent us from thinking. On the contrary, the attacks open a period of questioning and doubts for millions of people among us who demand answers—even if these answers cause discomfort and challenge the consensus. This is critical in order to prevent others from imposing their warlike, repressive and racist responses. What follows is an attempt to answer, in an incomplete form, some of these questions, but also to formulate the lines of work and action. Perhaps this may sound rigid, but it points out a real concern about what we must do: action instead of submission.

The murderers are not without responsibility

With respect to the killings themselves, two apparently opposing discourses confront one another, but they have one point in common: They relieve the murderers from responsibility. The first discourse dominates the politico-media elites: The killers are described as “crazy” or “monsters,” they are “barbarous,” and there is no way to explain their actions rationally. The second discourse comes from various anti-racist and/or anti-imperialist activists: The killers are a product of French political policy, both domestic and foreign, and can be understood (without justifying them) as a consequence of these policies.

The first of these discourses exploits the legitimate emotions arising from the violence of the killings in order to censure any reflection and any attempt at explanation. The second discourse, which I feel closer to, suffers from the same defect as the first: It “forgets” that the killers are themselves subjects who thought for themselves and took action, and they aren’t simply passive byproducts of racism and imperialism. In certain ways, this discourse comes dangerously close to that of the conspiracy theorists who see the murderers as puppets of the great powers. Yet the killers themselves have a discourse (see their interviews and videos, in which they speak about Syria and Iraq, the offenses suffered by Muslims at the hands of France and in the world in general, etc.); they have their own theory (especially note the article published by Mediapart); they have their own organizational reference points (Islamic State, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula).

Why insist on this point? Certainly not in order to judge the killers independently from the political,

economic and social context (both national and international) in which they evolved, thus excusing France and its policies. Rather, it is necessary to understand this in order to shine a light on the discourse and the political positions of the Kouachi brothers and of Amedy Coulibaly, who, from their point of view, believe, rationally, that they are at war with a certain France, and that they consider, rationally, themselves to be engaged in a legitimate defense. See this statement that Coulibaly gave in a posthumous video:

You attack the Caliphate, you attack the Islamic State, so we attack you. You can't attack and expect nothing in return.

France (re)discovers it is at war

One of the causes for the shock hitting large sections of the population, including circles of left-wing activists, is the (re)discovery of this truth: Yes, France is at war. A war which does not always speak its name, a war which is not discussed in the governmental assemblies or in the media, and is generally not talked about in the public arena, a war against enemies who are not often identified, an asymmetric war—but a war all the same. The recent killings, in the most brutal way, brought this to light for those who did not know, or those who refused to see, or those who had forgotten. France is at war, war creates casualties, and these casualties do not always only fall in your enemy's home.

With whom is France at war? According to various discourses and the media, it is at war against "international terrorism," against "jihadism," against "fundamentalist barbarism," etc. I won't discuss these imprecise labels and the abusive generalizations they imply, nor the paradoxes that underlie them (alliances based on an unstable geometry, support for regimes that support the development of "jihadist" currents, participation in military interventions that reinforce these currents, etc.). It is enough to underline that France has, in reality, followed the lead of George W. Bush and the United States after September 11, 2001, in the rhetoric and politics of the "clash of civilizations," even if not always saying so out loud.

France has been at war for almost 14 years without saying so. If the killings at Charlie Hebdo and at the Porte de Vincennes have provoked such shock and such dismay, this is because many people have been forced to abruptly absorb 14 years of recent history in just hours or days: "Here we are, us too, and it's only logical that we would not be spared forever." After the United States (September 11), after Spain (the attacks in Madrid in 2004), after Great Britain (the attacks in London in 2005), etc. Now it is France that has been caught up in its history, both its recent past and its present, and is, by necessity, forced to look in the mirror and ask: why "us?"

National unity and republican unity

Many statements, texts and articles have pointed out the foolishness of "national unity" and the hypocrisy that accompanies it. Others have emphasized the dangers of such a "union" and the exploitation which can be carried out in its name, and which has, in fact, already been carried out. There is another point that I would like to emphasize here: those who have answered the call for unity did not necessarily do so out of excessive patriotism or chauvinism. For many of them, in fact, they did so to affirm a commitment to certain principles and values (freedom, equality), which are supposed to be guaranteed by the "Republican model."

National unity is indeed, in many respects, a republican unity ["republican" in the sense of the French Republic], with which it should not be confused. This sort of unity does not necessarily defend France just because it is France. Rather, it is put forward to defend a certain model of society, in the name of values and emancipatory principles that have nothing to do with chauvinism. But behind this unity, there are different postures and divergent discourses, and contradictions can

be seen: For some (institutional parties, editorialists, mainstream intellectuals), the killings are a sign that “our model” is under attack and it is necessary to defend it; for others (from Edwy Plenel [editor-in-chief of *Mediapart*] to Jean-Luc Mélenchon [ex-Socialist Party Minister of Education and leader of the Left Front] as well as certain talking heads and academics who publish in journals and blogs), the killings are a sign that “our model” is dysfunctional and it is necessary to question it.

I am one of those who thinks that there is no such thing as a republican model “à la française” which can truly guarantee liberty and equality for all and protect us from such violence. This does not mean completely denigrating or rejecting “republican” aspirations out of hand, from beginning to end; no, the millions of people who took to the streets are not, neither objectively nor subjectively, out-and-out reactionaries. Quite the contrary, they are clearly posing relevant and legitimate questions, which can be summarized as follows: “What have we done to create such monsters?”

Putting forward radical responses

The current situation, which clearly favors the powers that be and their reactionary discourse, isn’t one in which anti-racists and anti-imperialists are completely disarmed. The millions who were stunned by the attacks, but who are questioning and who refuse to concede to the rhetoric of “defense” of “our model” and of “our values” are not condemned to silence, and radical responses can be put forward. These radical responses are based on the sense in which Marx understood the word when he wrote “to be radical, it is necessary to grasp things by their roots.” Radical answers are required that call into question a system that generates structural inequality, exploitation and violence.

The debates taking place about schools, about prisons, about secularism, about anti-terrorist legislation, etc., do not take on the real issues, that is, the material conditions (be they economic, social or political), which have allowed the reactionary and violent discourse of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria to be accepted by certain youth—who were born, grew up and were socialized in France—and convinced them to take action. These are the material conditions (misery and social marginalization, ghettoization, structural racism, oppression based on their identity, stigmatization, and individual and collective humiliation, etc.) that must be examined, along with all the discourses that accompany them, legitimate them or exploit them.

This means, in particular, a fight against what is considered to be obvious by those repeating in the dominant discourse: [we must argue that] religion is not a factor in the radicalization of young “jihadists,” rather, it is a vehicle for their radicalization. Empirical studies confirm the “anger against injustice, moral superiority, the feeling of having an identity and purpose, the promise of adventure and the desire to become a hero all exist in the case studies. Religion and ideology serve as vehicles for an ‘us against them’ mentality and as a justification for violence against those who represent the ‘enemy,’ but they do not fuel radicalization.”

Unite without ignoring sensitive topics

It is necessary, therefore, to capture reality in all its complexity and dynamism, and to reject any simplistic shortcuts: The killers are not just “crazy” or simply “victims.” They are political actors in their own right who consider themselves to be engaged in a war. They hold a worldview that has as much in common with that of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria as it does with many of our rulers: civilization against civilization, identity against identity, violence against violence. To state this is not the same as drawing an equal sign between the two “camps”; after all, it is the racist, colonial and militarist policies of the Western countries that create the conditions of possibility for the development of their adversarial “jihadist,” and not the other way around.

In order to grasp this reality in its complexity, it is also necessary to understand, and to assert, that the recent killings aren't the first manifestations of this war on French territory. The war has been raging for a long time—against the poor, against Muslims, against young people from the neighborhoods. The factors that radicalized the Kouachi brothers and Amedy Coulibaly are not confined to French foreign policy, but also (and even primarily) spring from its domestic policy. We only have to recall various episodes in the “miserable childhood of the Kouachi brothers,” or remind ourselves that Coulibaly's best friend was killed by a police officer during a robbery in 2000, and that this same Coulibaly was singled out in 2010 for denouncing prison conditions at Fleury-Mérogis. In other words, we can say (without apology) that this attack was a French attack and expressed (in a horribly distorted way) a violent resentment against a “model” that serves as nothing more than a machine that manufactures and stigmatizes inequalities.

We must therefore state loud and clear: each act of ethnic profiling, every instance of police brutality, every episode of discrimination, each Islamophobic attack and every military expedition in the name of the superiority of a civilization...increases resentment and provides “jihadist” currents new potential candidates. Not all those who suffer this resentment will take this sort of action: but most of them who will take action are recruited under these conditions. Thus, the unity we need to respond to the government's racist and security-state offensive must not sacrifice two essential elements, even though there is not a consensus on these (we at least know this for certain): First, the fight against Islamophobia in all its forms (injecting into this battle the idea that another form of racism, anti-Semitism, is not a “response” but an equally odious poison); and second, the relentless struggle against French military expeditions (remembering the slogans raised in the demonstrations that followed the Madrid attacks: “Your war, our dead,” “Bombs dropped in Iraq explode in Madrid,” etc.).

Anti-racist and anti-imperialists are not doomed to submit to the current offensive. But in order to deal with the storm, we must stay the course and concede nothing under the pressure of emotion or shock. Any repressive, stigmatizing or blind response to the economic, political and social realities of France in 2015 is not only doomed to failure but, more importantly, will be merely another step toward new killings tomorrow. Fourteen years of the “war on terror” have brought only more war, oppression, discrimination and violence to the four corners of the globe: It's time to move, radically, on to something else.

Julien Salingue

P.S.

* Translation by Todd Chretien for Socialist Worker:
<http://socialistworker.org/2015/11/15/your-wars-our-dead>