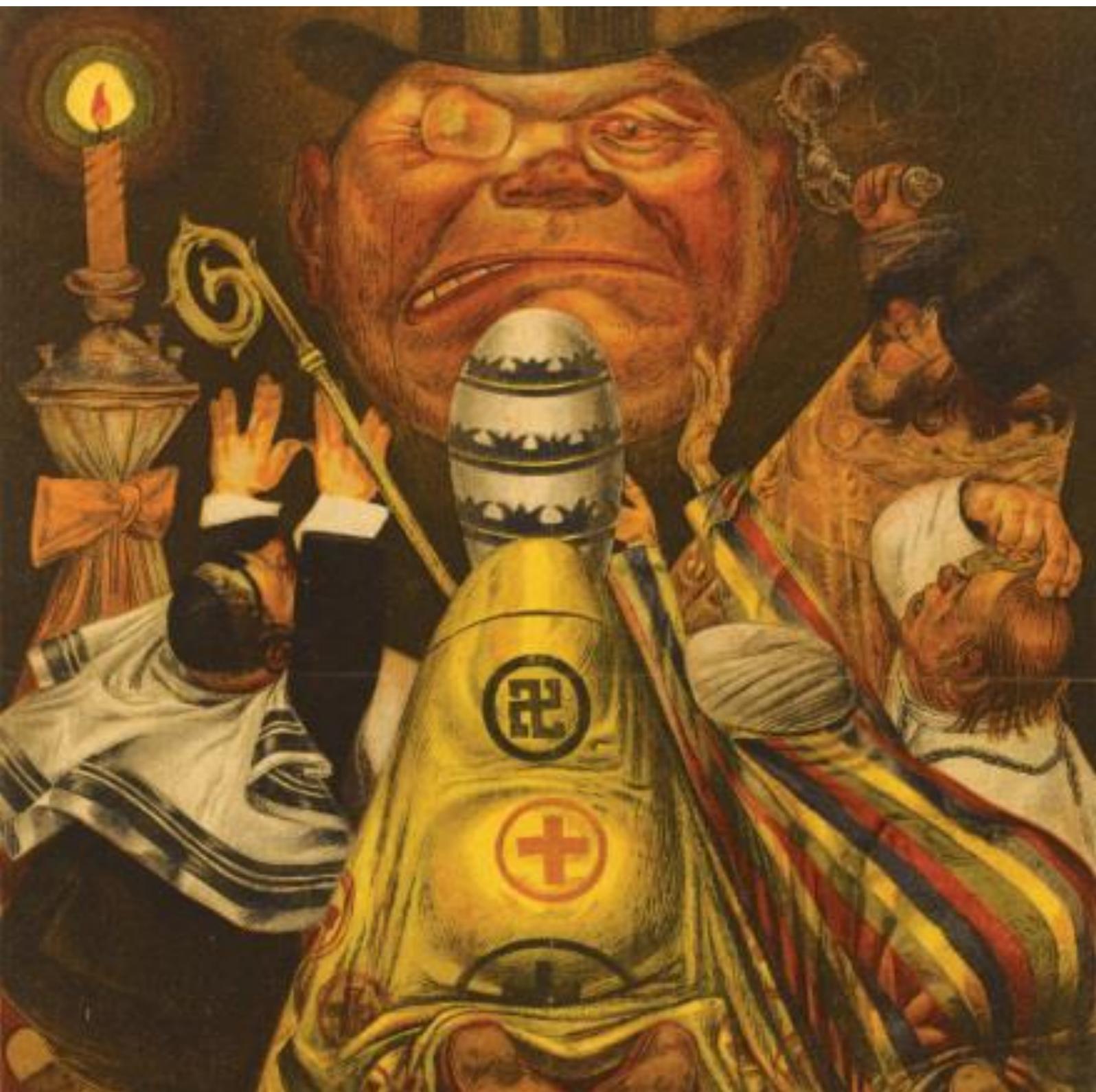


AGAINST RELIGIOUS FANATICISM, AGAINST THE STATE



On irrationalism & the caliphate

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Neither God nor master! [*Ni dieu ni maître!*]

— Auguste Blanqui

Communism begins from the outset with atheism; but atheism is at first far from being communism; indeed, that atheism is still mostly an abstraction.

— Karl Marx

Whatever were the aims of those responsible for the massacre at *Charlie Hebdo*, the consequence was to terrorize the whole population. To terrorize so as to prevent understanding, so as to set up even higher artificial barriers between people on the basis of religious belief. Religion has become a veritable arm of political Islam everywhere in the world. In France this is opposed by the religion of state, said to be secular and republican. In presenting itself as the guardian of civil peace, the state calls for national unity around itself. It demands that the population delegates to it the defence of freedom and democracy. It's a defence which comes at the price of the preventive restriction of individual and collective liberties and an increased repression of all anti-state dissent. For the defenders of "white identity" like the Front Nationale the attack confirmed that "civil war has already started" against an already identified enemy — the Muslims. All Muslims: whether they share the views of the fanatics, whether they fight them, or whether they simply silently submit to them. The foreigner, "the other" from here or wherever, is the target for the fanatics on all sides. The despicable attack on *Charlie Hebdo* plays the game of the state and weakens the only class, the working class, which can concretely fight religious fanaticism where it is rooted, where it seeks searches for its potential soldiers, in working class neighbourhoods and in workplaces. This fight is indispensable if we are not to give up the asserting the need for the exploited and oppressed to organize themselves independently against the state, against all states. As for violent political Islam, its objective is to force Muslims to isolate themselves and to serve as cattle to be sacrificed in Syria, or even right here. What matters is to understand this phenomenon so as to be able to fight it without mercy, and without becoming bound hand and foot to the state.

Irrationalism and the caliphate

Political Islam has become a global subject of debate and of polarization of civil society into illusory opposed communities. Each one of these illusory communities claims to fight in the name of a certain idea of civilization, only being able to fully express itself in the complete defeat of the other, identified as the enemy because of the faith it professes, including the faith in secularism and the state. In the name of such and such a belief in the supernatural, almost anything can be ignored: the question of the millennia-old oppression of women; the family; international migration; jobs; housing; food, etc. The deforming and mystifying prism of religion becomes the supposed justification for irrationality, rejection of the reality-principle, and more generally the denial of the humanity to enemies of the faith. This specific mystification of social relations penetrates deeply into the heads of numerous proletarians here, in the advanced capitalist countries, as well as into those of their brothers and sisters on the periphery of the most developed capitalist world.

Because of their incontestable success, these reactionary fideist ideas become a powerful material force adding to those that already shape the surface of the capitalist globe. The extension of fideism in all its forms overturns priorities and redefines capitalist camps in all regions of the planet. But, like every ideology, this long wave of obscurantism is not able to hold back the determinism of matter and the social relations which the ideology claims to replace. Capitalism is not threatened by faith any more than the class societies which preceded it. Fideism is nothing other than a particular ideological expression of class submission.

Fideism is a Catholic theological term, linked to traditionalism. According to it the truth can only be known by tradition, not by reason. All knowledge is founded on a primitive revelation that prolongs and enriches Christian revelation. Only faith, the illuminating intelligence (itself intuitive, thus distinct from reason, which is analytical), makes us know the basis of things, that is to say, spiritual realities. More precisely, fideism excludes the possibility that the truths of faith can consist of rational preambles, resting on proof, including a kernel of rationality which could be absorbed into an autonomous philosophy. In another sense, also theological, fideism makes faith consist of trust in God, not in adhesion to dogmas. In all cases, the term fideism implies a defiance of reason; that's why it had a pejorative flavor to it. In the same way that rationalism tends to overestimate reason to the point of professing that science is the only source of truth (so rejecting in advance any belief), fideism tends to overestimate faith to the point of professing that revelation is the only guarantee of truth (so discrediting the efforts of all rational activity).[1]

The revolutionary proletariat must first of all fight fideism in itself and treat it as what it is: an instrument of class division which reinforces the dictatorship of capital and states and which is used to recruit the exploited and oppressed into new wars which benefit the dominant classes. In particular, the fideism of the Book (Bible) — but also that of Hinduism along with the vast majority of religious beliefs — is dedicated to God, patriarchy and family. The caliphate, the reactionary fideist ideology which seems to be achieving the greatest success right now, is worthy of our attention particularly as it drapes itself in the colors of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism and, above all, constitutes a central element of the aggravation of the geostrategic crisis of the Middle East. This is why we're devoting a specific text to it, composed of four points.

First point

The partisans of the caliphate try to establish an order which will be favourable to them in regions where capitalism rules but where it has not (or very little) dissolved the social relations inherited from the class societies which preceded it. Some 10,000 Sunni tribes in Iraq are the clearest example of it. The archaic tribal social structure has survived on the margins of modern capital, feeding itself from oil rent and petty commodity trading, often illegal. The Iraqi Sunni tribe has been transformed by the extension of the domination of capital but the ancestral patriarchal ties have not been broken. The tribe administers its territory. It is a little world closed towards the exterior and the interior, except when it has to accumulate means of survival by clientelism and haggling. Today, a large number of Sunni tribes in Iraq pledge allegiance to the IS.[2] This bloody group guarantees the permanence of the tribal structure. More than that, the self-proclaimed caliphate sanctifies them.

The other face of the present caliphate is represented by people like Mokhtar Belmokhtar, known as “one eye,” a Salafist from the beginning who became celebrated from 2013 because of his attack on the refinery at Amenas in Algeria. Also known as “Mister Marlboro,” this sinister character is also at the head of a vast traffic in cigarettes amounting to around a billion US dollars per year in the whole of Saharan Africa. It’s a traffic which has been able to develop thanks to the blood ties with the Tuareg tribes. Smugglers, day-to-day chicken thieves, traders in human beings (prostitution, trafficking of migrants), drug dealers, all these participants in illegal business find in the caliphate a means of consolidating their lucrative activities and a way to develop others, “whitewashed” by adherence to the faith.

IS itself is an important commercial enterprise in Syria and Iraq which trades in oil, women and consumer goods. Its program can be summarized as “who has weapons has bread and women.” This gang presents no danger for capitalism, which can perfectly well accommodate rentiers and traffickers, and, what’s more, creates them. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Cameroons and Niger, Al-Shabab in Somalia, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Sahel, Al-Qaida in the Arab peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the Talibans in Afghanistan and Pakistan along with Abu Sayyaf in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia — and those are just the best known ones — replicate the same social relations expressed by IS.

These considerations don’t apply to Shi’a Islam, whose centralized internal organisation, similar to fascism, has allowed it to adapt to modern capitalism, just like the Catholic Church.

Second point

IS was born from the rubble of an Arab nationalism founded on the model of previous popular democracies based on an alliance between a single party (Ba’athist in the cases of Iraq and Syria), the army and a single union. This model aimed at creating modern postcolonial economies, equipped with strong industry, a unified internal market and an effective secular state. This project was smashed from the outside by the progressive collapse of the Russian bloc, and internally by the emergence from the ruins of national liberation of a parasitic ruling caste, corrupt, despotic, and inefficient.

On this basis, the caliphate of IS is in perfect continuity with the Arab regimes which it claims to oppose. Its sources of survival are trade and plunder; its organization is clientelist and stuffed with incompetents. The IS diverges from the Sunni regimes only in terms of geostrategic positioning. And this is from the simple fact that its regime tries to impose itself on the other states of the region, including those for which Sunni fideism is the official religion.

The US has benefited from the fall of the Russian empire and extended its influence over the Arab regimes whose vague desires for capitalist development have been seriously revised over the last few decades. An important new stage was reached by Washington with the active support for the Taliban in the war against Russia in Afghanistan and then with the first Iraq war. These two episodes marked the adoption by the US administration of an aggressive diplomacy in this area, so as to make the US once again into a power to be reckoned with in the Middle East. The Arab Spring gave Washington the opportunity to also occupy a leading role in the whole of North Africa. The attempt has still not produced a conclusive result.

If General Al-Sissi in Egypt destroyed the Muslim Brothers' organization and followed in the wake of Hosni Mubarak in matters of foreign policy and strategic alliance with Washington, in Libya, the violent removal of Muammar Gaddafi has still not allowed a *pax Americana* to be installed, nor has that happened in Afghanistan or Iraq.

In their turn, the two regional Middle Eastern powers, Turkey and Iran, have tried, by pursuing very divergent diplomatic approaches, to take advantage of the acceleration of the geostrategic crisis of the region. The first focused on the development of Islamic regimes as an outcome of the "Arab Spring." For the moment Ankara's policy has been a failure. Their support, explicit for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, less open for Palestinian Hamas and publicly denied for IS, has ended up with the growing diplomatic isolation of Turkey. The crushing of the Brothers in Egypt, the military defeat of Hamas in Gaza by Israeli troops and the involvement of the Western powers against IS has pushed back the influence of Turkey in the region and weakened its historic relations with the US and Europe.

As for Iran, the setbacks for the "Arab springs" of Sunni inspiration have put it back in the centre of the regional arena. Tehran controls Baghdad, has established solid relations with the government of Iraqi Kurdistan, preserves its Lebanese bastion, supports Bashar al-Assad with increasing efficacy in Syria, where the regime has shown an undeniable capacity for survival, and profits from its fight against IS. All this has the aim of hastening the end of Western sanctions and resolving the nuclear issue.

Third point

Outside the geostrategic and diplomatic dimension, the emergence of violent political Islam provides the states of the advanced countries with a formidable weapon of class division, restricting individual and collective freedoms and enlarging the social base which embraces the dominant ideology. Emergency measures increase. Repressing terrorism means that the burden of factual proof becomes less and less needed. What we are seeing is the loss of part of fundamental bourgeois rights like that of expressing opinions by a mere public demonstration.

The spectre of the IS cut-throats terrorizes whole sections of the population in the western capitalist citadels. Here, important sectors of the proletariat embrace identity-based ideologies of defence of religion, family and country. Reactionary “white” organizations like the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy, UKIP in the UK and the NPD in Germany take advantage of this fear. Often, they attract the votes of the desperate poor during elections. They fuse together, willy-nilly, anger against impoverishment and growing insecurity, the rejection by males of the undermining of patriarchy, and fear of immigrants and young hooligans from council estates, under their banner of defence of “tradition,” of the “good old days,” of God, Family and Nation. Paradoxically, they can happily criticize the positions of Islam towards women, all the better to make people forget their own patriarchal oppression of women. And this is not the only confusion within their ideology. In the Czech Republic neo-Nazis demonstrated against Syrian victims of IS (including their sick children) being given refuge.

Populations identified as Muslim in the advanced capitalist countries become the target of all kinds of accusations. Frozen in their own mystified representation as “community of believers” (*Umma*), they are ceaselessly told to condemn political Islam. A small minority of Muslims chose to take up the image which states stick on them by supporting a caliphate.

In France, their first step towards the caliphate is without doubt anti-Semitism. An anti-Semitism which spreads dangerously and finds fertile soil in the extreme left, who mix up the just condemnation of the conditions of the Palestinian ruled classes under Israeli colonization with support for the so-called “resistance” of the anti-Semites in Hamas, who exercise a dictatorial power of a rare brutality in Gaza and who are in power in all the Occupied Territories thanks to their governmental alliance with the PLO. In France, anti-Semitic attacks make up half of all racist attacks, targeting a population of Jewish origin which is only 1% of the total population. This “Sunni” anti-Semitism finds a favorable echo in the kind propagated by small groups of the “white” far right, as well as the Iranian variety represented by [Alain] Soral and Dieudonné[M’bala M’bala].

Muslims coming from the developed countries who rally to the caliphate don’t have the same motivations as those who live in the peripheral countries. The only thing they have in common is the desire to consecrate the submission of women. Western fighters for the caliphate don’t have a homogenous class origin. It’s more a question of isolated young men, not very informed, without any definite social roots, rejecting proletarianisation, refusing the way of life of their parents and not hiding their hostility towards women who have chosen to be independent from men (“sluts”). The promise of a heroic life going beyond isolation and urban and suburban solitude through a brotherhood of war that also sanctifies the dominant role of men in line with the religious precepts of Islam are the two principal arguments in favour of the *hijra* [migration to a Muslim country] to fight the infidel.

The sacralisation of the oppression of women and the family is an essential pillar of the caliphate. Even the most impoverished men find in it the possibility of exercising an absolute power over their spouses. The pious woman who submits in body and soul to her husband gets in exchange the protection of the religion from other males. The walled-up domestic slave, rejecting her own self from the fact of her inaccessibility, the

woman nevertheless becomes in the caliphate the object of the most abusive fantasies on the part of the men. The fight for respect of individuals united in a society which has become fully human can only come about by means of the struggle for the liberation of women from the family and male domination. The true significance of the strategic alliance between the revolutionary working class and women's liberation movements becomes apparent in the countries where fideist ideology can be found.

Fourth point

The rise of the caliphate has enormously revived the fervour of the anti-Muslim fideists. The priests of the other faiths largely benefit from it. But they also share what is essential with the caliphate: the cult of the irrational and inexplicable, the mystique of the faith and the mortification of the flesh and the spirit. This is why the fight to the death against religion and for the defence of materialism cannot be limited to political Islam.

To those who are in the front line of the war against the bloodthirsty madmen of IS, to those Kurdish and Syrian fighting men and women in Kobanê and elsewhere who love freedom, our message is this: their will and their sacrifice resounds as a universal call to revolt. Yet this message remains incomplete and today is pressed into the service of geopolitical competition between various capitalist powers. Mass resistance against IS in Kobanê is today ruled by Kurdish nationalist political factions from Turkey and Iraq. They exploit it either to establish (in the case of PKK) or to strengthen (in the case of KDP) their own bourgeois dictatorship, and we must have no illusions about this.

That's why the mortal struggle engaged by volunteers in Kobanê against the caliphate is not aimed against the division of societies into classes. Class society is the origin of this modern form of barbarism that is now manifested in the caliphate and, more generally, in all religious mystification. As Marx explained:

Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.

To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.

— Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843)

To overcome this essential limit, it is more than ever necessary to develop the political autonomy of the proletariat to put an end to the oppression and exploitation of man by man.

Notes

[1] Henry Duméry, *Encyclopaedia Universalis*.

[2] Islamic State group, also known as ISIS, ISIL and by the Arabic abbreviation Da'esh.

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subversionpress.wordpress.com

