

# \* Will the French Far Left learn from Toulouse murders?

28 March, 2012

**On 19 March, Mohammed Merah, a French citizen of Algerian descent and a self-described member of al Qaeda, killed three Jewish children and an adult at a Jewish school in Toulouse; the previous week he had shot dead three French soldiers of North-African origin. At first, the killer's identity was not known. On 22 March Merah was tracked down by French police and shot dead. *Ni patrie, ni frontières* discusses and criticises the reaction of the Left to Merah's killings.**

## **Anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism have a long history in France.**

Pogroms happened around the first crusade of 1095; Jews were several times expelled from the French kingdom in the Middle Ages (from 633 to 1394); for a time Jews were obliged by the Church to wear a "rouelle," a yellow patch which preceded the invention of the yellow star by the Nazis.

At the end of 19th century, after France's defeat by Prussia in 1870, Jews became a favourite target of the Far Right, of right-wing and anti-Republican Catholics, and also of part of the workers movement, especially when financial scandals occurred. At each important social crisis, between the two world wars, far-right groups which could organise hundred thousands of people (like the "Croix de Feu") targeted the Jews, for example, the Popular Front's Socialist Party Prime Minister Leon Blum.

During the Second World War, the Pétain government not only cooperated with the Nazis but its "legal" (racial and racist) definition of who could be considered as a Jew was stricter in France than in Germany, thanks to French lawyers and politicians! Jews were banned from most professions (lawyers, doctors, judges, teachers, journalists, state employees, actors, soldiers, cops, etc.) and lost their properties, from small shops and flats to shares and capitals invested in big companies. In the high schools and universities, Jews were not allowed to represent more than 3% of the students. The word "Jew" was mentioned on the identity cards.

As early as September 1940, the French government created a very detailed "Jewish file" which later helped the cops to arrest 80,000 Jews, 77,320 of whom were killed.

And the French government convinced the Nazis to deport 11,000 children when the fascists initially wanted to deport "only" the Jews who were older than 16 years old...

Today France has the largest Jewish population as well as the largest "Muslim" population in Europe. Obviously, the fact that the Toulouse killer was a French Muslim will not help solidarity between Jews and Muslims in France. A common demonstration was planned by the leaders of the two religious communities, but was cancelled when the murderer was identified and killed. Nevertheless, other common demonstrations happened or will happen in the suburbs of Paris and in other towns of France.

During this week, Jewish and Muslim religious authorities tried their best to explain that the Muslim religion was not an issue in these murders and to put the blame on Mohammed Merah's supposed "madness" and on his "crazy" interpretation of the Quran. They worked hand in hand with the police and Sarkozy government to prevent any religious or political manipulation of the Toulouse attack. It's the same government which, for years, has targeted Muslim women for wanting to wear a hijab at school and in public administration and for their customary ritual slaughter of animals – the French Prime Minister's comment about this "archaic custom" shocked the Jewish community leaders who have a similar way of slaughtering animals.

Nevertheless, as soon as the identity of the killer was known, Jewish radio stations started a violent campaign against Islam, confusing this religion with its most extremist political forms, like internationalist jihadism, while repeating "Let's not make any amalgam or confusion." It's true that Jewish radio stations (RCJ, Radio J, Radio Judaïques, Radio Shalom, etc.) in France are very right-wing and usually invite the most conservative members of the "community," but listening to their comments this week was rather worrying, even taking into account their understandable emotion. One can only hope these nasty comments do not reflect the general opinion of French Jews.

The reactions of the (reformist or radical) left-wing militants, as expressed on the Internet, were no less worrying. None of these militants noticed that the Toulouse attack is the third attack in 30 years

which killed Jews in France and which the Left hastily attributes to the Far Right. (And, very cleverly, Sarkozy and his government did the same: we are in the middle of an electoral campaign and any blow against Le Pen is useful from Sarkozy's point of view.)

The same attitude prevailed when four people were killed by a bomb put in front of the Copernic synagogue in Paris, on 3 October 1980 (it's a miracle that "only" four people were killed that Friday, which was also a Jewish religious feast); and when six people were killed and 22 wounded in Paris, on 9 August 1982. That time, a terrorist commando (attributed to a Palestinian grouplet called Fatah-Revolutionary Leadership but also to German neo-Nazis who had been trained in Palestine) attacked Goldenberg's restaurant in the rue des Rosiers (in a former Jewish district, and close to a synagogue). The third time, in Toulouse, on 19 March 2012, three Jewish children (seven, five, and four years old) and one adult were killed. One teenager was seriously wounded and is still in intensive care.

The blame for the attack was instantly put on the Far Right – a sad example of that attitude can be illustrated by the article in *Solidarity* 239, which is rather surprising as the AWL is one of the rare Far Left organisations in the world which has criticized left anti-Semitism for years.

In this text, the author favoured the hypothesis of a far-right attack.

He recalls that the OAS (Secret Army Organisation) during the Algerian war tried to overthrow De Gaulle's regime and to impede Algeria's independence, by organising a military coup and mobilizing French settlers in Algeria. He mentions the influence of French fascists in the military forces; but he ignores the fact that the pro-colonialist Far Right never killed the Vietnamese, Algerian or African soldiers who were fighting under its command inside the French military forces.

In their numerous books, top-rank officers of French colonial armies always hail the courage and qualities of their African, Arab or Asian soldiers or lower-rank officers.

Actually, it was the French military forces which invented the use of colonial forces against liberation movements (a technique which was then copied by the Americans in Vietnam and elsewhere). They recruited among the colonised people and trained African, Arab and Asian soldiers to torture and kill the independentist militants and guerrillas.

A good part of the 66,000 "*harkis*" (*harkis* are Algerians who chose to cooperate, under different forms, with the French military forces during the Algerian war and fled with their families to France after the independence to avoid being killed by the Algerian NLF) and of their descendants vote for the National Front today. In 1997, the "first and second generation *harkis*" (*sic*) represented 154,000 people: between 24 and 28% of them intend to vote for Marine Le Pen at the next presidential election, 26 % for Sarkozy and 26% for Hollande, the Socialist Party candidate. So Mohamed Merah's attack against Jewish children has nothing to do with the Far Right tradition in the French military forces.

And these murders have nothing to do with racism inside the French police, either. The above-quoted article mentions the killing of around 200 Algerians on 17 October 1961 by Parisian cops and points to the existence of fascist and Far Right traditions in the French police (the National Front tried to create a policemen's trade union but it was finally banned). This is true, but today the French police recruits more and more people who have one or two Arab, Berber, or Black African parents.

The racism of Franco-French cops is directed much more against Arab or African ordinary citizens (legal or undocumented foreign workers, African-French or Arab-French people) than against their Black or Arab colleagues inside the police forces (racism exists also inside the French police of course, but it's much more violent against "normal" citizens).

So those who believe in the virtues of a democratic Republic can blame Sarkozy and his government for not fighting against the racist attitudes of the cops towards the non-Franco-French population. They can blame them for encouraging racist prejudices and discriminations against Roma, against Africans (accused of having several women, many children and living on social benefits, etc.), against North Africans (accused of practicing a "dangerous and archaic" religion). But they can't blame Sarkozy and his ministers for fuelling anti-Semitism in France. Such an argument is totally absurd as an explanation for Mohammed Merah's killings in the Jewish school in Toulouse!

As said before, this is not the first time that the French Left hastily puts the blame on the Far Right when Palestinians or so-called sympathisers of the Palestinian cause kill Jews in France.

Once more, this week, many Far Left or anarchist militants (inside and outside France) were paralysed or blind, and this even before knowing the killer's identity. They did not dare to clearly condemn this attack as an anti-Semitic attack.

Therefore, it may be useful, although it's a tedious task, to recall what were the arguments one could read on the Internet before the identity of the killer was known and even after the cops discovered he was a French Muslim, influenced by a terrorist-nihilistic ideology such as Al-Qaeda's.

We have spotted at least eight main arguments which were supposed to explain why this attack was not anti-Semitic:

1. **Arabs and Jews are "Semites."** This silly argument is used in all sorts of left-wing or radical left circles when these militants discuss the Middle East, North Africa, or Islam. This concept was used in the 19th-century to explore the proximities between several languages (Arab, Hebrew, Berber, Tchadian, Akkadian, Phoenician, Aramean and Ethiopian languages). All historians today reject the existence of a Semitic race or Semitic people. Only ignorant leftists or anarchists still believe in these oddities...

2. **The murderer was crazy** and should have been treated by a psychiatrist.

This argument has been used by different tendencies of the Left (from the Socialist Party to the Trotskyists), but also by many intellectuals, rabbis, imams, and journalists. Exactly like in the case of Anders Behring Breivik's attack in Norway, the media tried to portray Mohamed Merah as a "lone wolf" and not as a bearer of a fascist ideology, in this case, an extremist form of internationalist jihadism.

3. **Mohamed Merah is the product of a barbaric capitalist society** which does not respect human life. This argument was used on anarchist forums by militants who wanted to "raise" the debate (I would rather say drown it) to a very abstract and general level, supposedly in order to evade any "manipulation" by the state, media or political parties. It's interesting to note that some anarchists had a much saner reaction: as they were living in Toulouse and closer to the local population, they were more able to express their explicit and radical condemnation of anti-Semitism and did not try to evade the question by putting the blame on an abstract "barbarism," which can be used to "explain" everything and anything.

4. **Mohamed Merah was just an ignominious bloody criminal.** This argument was also used in January 2006 when Ilan Halimi was kidnapped, sequestered, tortured and finally killed by Youssef Fofana and two dozens of his African, Arab, Portuguese and French friends living in the suburb of Bagneux. The media and the Far Left tried to play down or hide the anti-Semitic dimension of this murder, reducing it to a purely criminal act, despite the fact that Ilan Halimi (an ordinary employee in a mobile phone shop) was kidnapped because his kidnappers thought "Jews have money" and would therefore certainly pay a ransom to free a member of their community.

5. **"Racism feeds terrorism. This tragedy is the bitter fruit of French domestic and foreign policy. Merah claimed that he committed the murders to avenge the deaths of Palestinian children, and against the ban on the headscarf in schools, as well as France's role in the occupation of Afghanistan"** (*Socialist Worker*, newspaper of the British SWP, 24 March 2012).

Although the French Jewish children killed by Mohamed Merah have no responsibility in the above-quoted crimes or political decisions, these British Trotskyists sadly succeeded, with these two sentences, in giving a disgusting illustration of the incapacity of many Far Left and some anarchist groups to deal with anti-Semitism today. And these "revolutionaries" do not even realise that the "logical link" they establish between the Jewish children of Toulouse and Palestine is exactly the same as the one made by the "Zionists" they relentlessly denounce. Israeli politicians declare that all Jewish children can be only protected if they go and live in Israel, and the "anti-Zionists" (like the SWP) explain Jewish children can be held responsible for the acts of the Israeli state. What's the difference between these two positions?

Furthermore, when a "radical" group takes for granted the "political" explanations of a fascist murderer, one can become deeply worried about their critical sense and intelligence... It's difficult to go farther in the dehumanisation of Jewish victims and negation of anti-Semitism.

6. **This attack serves the interests of Israel**, a criminal state which presents itself as a victim. Another variant: "It serves the interests of Sarkozy during his presidential campaign." Philippe Poutou's first reaction – he is the candidate of the New Anticapitalist Party and adopted a better position later — was: *"Apparently the man is crazy but it's perhaps not a coincidence that it happens during the electoral campaign. There may be a political calculation behind it to create a diversion in front of the economic*

*crisis.*” Yes, of course, cynical politicians can and do denounce anti-Semitism for their own interests. But in no way their attitude should push us to stay silent or passive when Jews are killed in the name of “Palestinian solidarity”!

**7. Everywhere in the world children are killed in ethnic and religious wars,** imperialist interventions, etc. Why should we make so much noise about Toulouse victims?

We have here another version of the “barbarism” argument. A way to evade the specifics of the Toulouse attack in order to talk about something else.

It’s true that children are killed everywhere on this planet, in Palestine or in Chechnya, in Colombia and in Rwanda, and that these murders do not create such a huge emotion in France or on a world scale. It’s obvious we should react much more about crimes committed in other countries. But it’s also obvious our protest is most efficient where we live and work, and in this case, the attack occurred in France.

Let’s finally underline that Israelis (and therefore Jews) are presented as “child-killers” by many anti-Zionists since the death of Mohammed al-Dura, on 30 September 2000. This propaganda has fuelled hate against all Jews, whether or not they live in Israel, whether or not they support the Israeli government. It has also fuelled the hate against Jewish children, wherever they live. A basic datum many left militants refuse to include in their reflections, ignoring one of the oldest anti-Semitic myths in the Western world.

**8. If you describe Mohamed Merah’s attack on Toulouse Jewish school as anti-Semitic, how do you characterise the other murders he committed against French soldiers?**

This argument is supposed to corner those who criticize anti-Semitism and push them to support... the French military forces, and to support its crimes in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Nevertheless, one can denounce the intervention of French military forces abroad, or in France, without wishing to kill, one by one, all its members... One can criticise the functioning of the police forces inside capitalist society, without wishing that today cops stop arresting murderers.

Those who use this doubtful argument have themselves no answer to provide about what should be precisely done today, and no answer about what a future revolutionary society could do to repress murderers, child abusers, rapists, and violent class enemies or simply political counter-revolutionary opponents. Therefore this argument is just another technique to explain away the anti-Semitic character of this attack.

This article starts with a question. I’m afraid the answer is no, given the weak capacities of self-criticism in Far Left circles.

**Note:** On 19 and 20 March, before knowing anything about the killer’s identity, I wrote an article (in French) which can be read online. The title was “The killings at the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse are an anti-Semitic act — we should not quibble about it!” (“La tuerie de Toulouse à l’école Ozar Hatorah est un acte antisémite – n’ergotons pas!” <http://www.mondialisme.org/spip.php?article1810>)

Y.C.