

# Hypocrisy, Hysteria and Historical Falsification Around the Attacks Against Charlie Hebdo

Freedom of speech of the reactionary ruling classes

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Global Research, February 20, 2015

[TML Weekly](#) 31 January 2015

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

The terrorist attack against *Charlie Hebdo* has resulted in a huge wave of sympathy and opposition to terrorist attacks. These just actions are positions of principle, as are the demonstrations of Muslim peoples demanding that the Prophet Muhammad not be caricatured. Blasphemy is a social act – an act directed toward someone else and their beliefs, which all persons whether religious, atheist or agnostic must respect. Without this respect, there is no discussion possible.

As with any event, the ruling elite advances its pawns. It presents itself as democratic, defending of freedom of speech, for peace, *etc.* In reality, it is doing the exact opposite. It muzzles scientists, cuts subsidies to organizations critical of its policies, militarizes the police against its own people, engages more and more in military adventures, *etc.*

The bourgeoisie is presented as the successor of the Enlightenment and Voltaire who reportedly said, “I do not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Philosophers, who claim to have grown up on a diet of Voltaire, have come forward to support this assertion. But this sentence was never uttered by Voltaire. It is Evelyn Beatrice Hall, who falsely attributed it to Voltaire in an article, as she herself admits.[1]



Voltaire wrote his 1763 “Treatise on Tolerance” about the case of the death sentence and execution of Jean Calas, father of a Huguenot family, on March 10, 1762, to oppose the religious massacres of the time, especially those carried out by the Jesuits against the

Huguenots. In Toulouse especially, this story caused all sorts of slanders and insults against the family, including calls for the death of the mother, the son, the parents and even the servant of the Calas family. After a lengthy analysis of religions throughout history and civilizations, he concluded that intolerance is not the fruit of religion, but of property. He said, among other things, "Seek not to vex the hearts of men, and they are yours." [2] He also wrote other books that dealt with blasphemy as a social act.

This is a far cry from the way the bourgeoisie uses Voltaire in the present and today's reality.

Another thing that the elites say to justify the existence of a magazine like *Charlie Hebdo* is that cartoons are the means of expression of the people, that they have existed forever in France, during the French Revolution, etc. As always, the bourgeoisie presents things as absolute, beyond classes and the future of society. During the French Revolution, there were cartoonists on both sides. The monarchy had its own, such as James Gillray or Boyer de Nimes.



One of the finest examples of the class character of caricature is the newspaper *Der Stürmer*, a Nazi weekly newspaper published by Julius Streicher starting in 1923. *Der Stürmer* used very entertaining content, pornography, cartoons and anti-capitalist appeals. In addition, in each paper and in each of its editions, *Der Stürmer* included in large letters at the bottom of the first page: "Die Juden sind unser Unglück" meaning "The Jews are our misfortune." He worked on building what Jeffrey Herf calls an anti-Semitic consensus.

Although Julius Streicher was not involved in the Nazi government apparatus or in the German armed forces, he was tried by the Nuremberg Tribunal where he was convicted of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death on October 1, 1946. The judgment reads in part,

"In his speeches and articles, week after week, month after month, he infected the German mind with the virus of anti-Semitism, and incited the German people to active persecution. [...]"

"Streicher's incitement to murder and extermination at the time when Jews in the East were being killed under the most horrible conditions clearly constitutes persecution on political and racial grounds in the context of war crimes, such as defined by the Charter, and constitutes a crime against humanity."

Can we then mock anything? Jokes against minorities, those who are persecuted (such as Muslims today), the downtrodden, desperate, destitute and the homeless are barbarism, not satire. The same goes for jokes against women, which seek to drag society back to a time when women were not equal to men.

To mock everything, as *Charlie Hebdo* claims it does today, amounts to sowing divisions amongst the peoples of the world. Such activity gives credibility to the bourgeois theory of the “clash of civilizations” promoted during the U.S. imperialist aggression against the peoples of the Middle East launched under Bush that has done so much harm to humanity.

## Notes

1. See: <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com>

2. *Toleration and Other Essays* 1775, Chapter “Whether Toleration Is Dangerous, and Among What Peoples It Is Found.”

Translated from original French by [TML Weekly Information Project](#), January 31, 214, in which this article first appeared in English.

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