

France: Victim of smear campaign, worker injured in anti-CPE protest emerges from coma

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Cyril Ferez, the 39-year-old French telecommunications worker severely injured by the police in an anti-CPE (“First Job Contract”) demonstration in Paris on March 18, has emerged from a three-week coma. He is still suffering from respiratory problems and a lung infection, but can respond to simple commands. Ferez was the victim of riot police brutality when he was beaten and trampled upon and left without any urgent medical assistance.

Ferez’s case was not even acknowledged by the police for 48 hours, and a blackout existed on his condition until his union, the SUD PTT (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy—Postal Office and Telecommunications Union), informed the press.

Ferez has a six-year-old son and lives in Torcy, just outside of Paris. He is an employee of Orange, a telecommunications company. SUD-PTT has collected witness statements and photographs of the incident. It claims they present “an absolutely overwhelming case against the police.”

The statement released by the union on March 22 reads: “After the demonstration against the CPE, Cyril was present in Place de la Nation. He had the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and was violently trampled by the police. They did not ‘judge it useful’ to get medical assistance. Today, Cyril, a SUD-PTT member, is between life and death.”

The statement continues: “All the demonstrators and passers-by saw the incident. The attitude of the police is getting more and more threatening and more provocative with each demonstration. The risk of things going too far and accidents happening is increasing. In the provinces, as in Paris, police charges are getting more frequent, as are arrests. Cyril, who is in no way a

hooligan [*casseur*], found himself on the ground and was trampled shamelessly in a police charge. As if that wasn’t enough, the police refused to call for medical assistance. Cyril was left for at least 20 minutes without assistance.”

From the start, a police smear campaign was launched to suggest that Ferez was himself responsible for his condition, labelling him an alcoholic. However, video footage and witnesses reveal Ferez being viciously assaulted at the Place de la Nation, where the 350,000-strong demonstration ended in a police battle with a small number of protesters.

There is no official tally of the number of people injured in police operations to clear protestors from university and high school occupations and blockades, as well as railway line and motorway invasions and street sit-downs. The clearing of the occupation by students of the Sorbonne in the early hours of March 13 by baton-wielding riot police using tear gas, ordered by Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and personally supervised by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, set the pattern for the subsequent repression of the movement.

Some 3,400 arrests have been announced, and sentences of up to eight months have been imposed on students with no criminal record.

The SUD PTT federation is asking the government and the minister of the Interior three questions: How did Cyril’s supposed state of inebriation justify his being trampled? Why did the police not alert the medical services? Why did the police authorities (*préfecture*) announce on the evening of the demonstration that there was no report of a seriously injured person?

The WSWs spoke last Friday with Régis Blanchot of

SUD PTT, who is in charge of Cyril Ferez's case for the union.

Blanchot commented: "Yesterday evening, he came to. He can't speak, but he understands and can respond to orders. The lung infection is not yet cured. He got it as a result of the violence of the blows he received, and then he had tubes inserted in hospital.

"We do not know in what state he will be left when he comes fully out of the coma. There is also the problem of all the lies that were told about him. The truth must come out.

"Everyone was very shocked, very angry about the disinformation campaign. They said that Cyril was an alcoholic, that he injured himself falling from his bed in the hospital. A CRS [riot police] officer said that it was other demonstrators who hit him. Instead of information coming from the police, there have been all sorts of leaks. The assembling of false information has only one aim: to whitewash the police.

"We've been working closely with the family. We have the same lawyer. We are waiting for the precise details of what happened so as to reply to the lies—the lies that smeared Cyril.

"During the anti-CPE movement, there have been thousands of arrests with summary appearances and often heavy sentences. In contrast, after three weeks in the case of Cyril, there has been only one investigation and there is still no investigating judge assigned to the case. We lodged our complaint on March 24. Sarkozy promised that there would be a full investigation. We have heard nothing, so we have lodged a second complaint."

Asked his opinion about undercover police intervening in the demonstrations wearing left political organisation and trade union stickers and badges, including those of the SUD, Blanchot replied:

"We think it's unacceptable. It can provoke violence. As for the question of the possibility of police provocateurs, we have our suspicions, but no proof—however, it's plausible. The *casseurs* often act with impunity, and at the end of demonstrations they get away, and many genuine demonstrators are arrested and get heavy sentences. That's what happened at the end of the April 4 demonstration [in Paris].

"Many of us remember the case of Malik Oussekiné [the student who died after a beating by a special motorcycle police brigade during protests over

education 'reform' in 1986]. Robert Pandraud, a minister working with the interior minister, Charles Pasqua, said: 'If I had a son who was on dialysis, he wouldn't be acting the idiot on the demonstrations.'

"That had a big impact on public opinion and contributed to the defeat of [current President Jacques] Chirac, the prime minister at the time, in the 1988 presidential elections. We thought about that when the police attempted to slander Cyril."

Nicolas Sarkozy, fearing the radicalisation of the protest movement, clearly had the 1986 events in mind when he explained why he supported a retreat on the CPE, in an interview published in the right-wing *Le Figaro* April 11:

"I would like to address right-wing voters and get them to ponder. Our most loyal voters want us not to yield to the street, and they are right. But also they want the chaos to stop and that we don't find ourselves with another Malik Oussekiné affair, which would have led to a disaster. I'm not here to make it easier for the left."



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