

Paris court defends racist provocateurs exploiting plight of homeless

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The Paris Administrative Tribunal has twice defended the right of an openly racist organisation, Solidarité des Français (SDF), to offer pig soup to homeless people in Paris, deliberately excluding those whose religion or customs forbid this food.

The anti-racist organisation MRAP (Movement against Racism and for the Friendship between the Peoples) reported in a January 2 statement that the previous evening the SDF had given out pig soup to some 30 homeless people in front of Montparnasse station in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, “thus deliberately excluding Parisian homeless people of the Jewish or Muslim religions who do not eat pork.”

The Paris police banned the SDF’s soup distributions but, on appeal by the organisation, the Paris Administrative Tribunal quashed the police order on December 22, and on December 28 supported another appeal against a further ban by the police authorities.

The tribunal’s judge issued a statement: “These two rulings recognise that this organisation is pursuing manifestly discriminatory aims against people whose religion forbids them to eat pig meat.” It asserts, however, “that only a risk of a public disturbance authorises the tribunal to issue a ban on an action” and that “the police chief had in no way given proof of such a risk.”

The judge asserted that, as there was no evidence that the SDF had refused to serve Jews and Muslims, it could not be accused of discriminating against them. The Paris police *préfecture* were ordered to pay €1,000 in costs to the group.

The SDF group is linked to a neo-fascist organisation called *Bloc Identitaire*. Street pig soup operations have been going on since 2002 in Paris, and in Strasbourg and Nice. Similar provocations have taken place in Belgium, in Charleroi and Brussels.

Where the far-right Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front has won control of town halls, such as Toulon, school canteens have been ordered to serve pork without offering alternatives for Muslims and Jews.

The *Guardian* newspaper quotes an SDF soup kitchen notice: “The only condition to eat with us: to eat pig.” It continues: “Attention: cheese, dessert, coffee, clothes, snacks go with pig soup: no pig soup, no dessert—the only rule of our action: our own people before the others.”

The minister of the interior and presidential candidate for the ruling UMP (Union for a People’s Party), Nicolas Sarkozy, appealed to the Council of State (the French equivalent of the US Supreme Court) against the Paris Administrative Tribunal’s rulings. On January 5, the Council of State quashed the tribunal’s decisions. It refuted the tribunal’s contention that the police banning of the SDF’s soup distribution was “a serious and illegal infringement” of the right to demonstrate. It supported the contention of the legal representative of the Ministry of the Interior that the SDF’s operation was “discriminatory” and therefore constituted a danger of public disorder.

The Socialist Party mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë, issued a statement January 2 regretting the Paris Administrative Tribunal’s rulings, “I remind people that from June 2004 the Paris Council had voted demanding the banning of this distribution, which knowingly excludes persons of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.”

It continued, “In response to this initiative with the stench of xenophobia, I want to express again the will of the municipality to denounce, and combat every form of discrimination, racism and anti-Semitism.”

As the 2007 presidential elections approach, it is clear that Sarkozy and Delanoë and the French political

establishment, although they have encouraged anti-immigrant prejudice, are nervous of appearing to condone extreme racist groups.

The cynical refusal by the judge to recognise the highly provocative nature of the SDF group's action gives a measure of the widespread acceptance of racist views within the French state and establishment, which legitimise the activities of such groups.

These attitudes are epitomised by a series of measures enacted by the current Gaullist administration, with more or less open support by the parties of the left:

- * the law banning the wearing of the Muslim headscarf by schoolgirls, which was supported by the Socialist Party;

- * the draconian anti-immigration laws largely echoed in the Socialist Party programme;

- * the hunting down and expulsion of *sans papiers* (undocumented immigrants) and the break-up of the Cachan squat involving homeless immigrants and *sans papiers*, with the complicity of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (See "France: Immigrant squatters pressured into accepting dispersal").

- * the initial support by the SP and the CP for the law imposing the recognition of the "beneficial" nature of French colonialism for the colonised, later partially modified in response to protests.

The racist activities of the SDF group are also facilitated by the worsening social conditions facing the poor, and the lack of housing in particular. A housing crisis has developed in France over the last 30 years under right and left national and local governments. This particularly affects the Paris region. Enormous speculative rises in the cost of land and property, as well as insufficient public housing, have made decent homes increasingly inaccessible to millions of people. This is most acutely felt in the winter, particularly during the Christmas period.

The charity DAL (Right to Housing) reports that the fire brigade estimates that every year 100 persons sleeping rough die in the street in the Paris region. The 7th Abbé Pierre Foundation report of 2002 (after five years of a Plural Left government) "counted 3 million inadequately housed people in France, of which 86,000 were homeless, 200,000 lodged permanently in hotels, in improvised housing or by relatives and friends, half a million living in temporary or precarious dwellings and 2 million in lodgings lacking any basic sanitary

provision."

This winter at the initiative of a charity group Children of Quixote, tent protests have mushroomed in city centres all over France demanding improvements in emergency accommodation for the homeless and even the requisition of buildings. The Children of Quixote have been adopted as a "cause célèbre" by the entire French political establishment, from the UMP of president Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy to the middle class radical Ligue communiste révolutionnaire. They are all seeking to acquire some political capital in the run-up to the presidential and legislative elections this year. However, only a socialist housing policy, taking land and housing out of the hands of the property speculators, and a massive building programme of social housing can resolve this crisis and end the ability of the far-right to exploit social grievances by scapegoating immigrants and minorities.



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