

France: Dray scandal hits student, anti-racist groups

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14 January 2009

Julien Dray, a prominent member of France's Socialist Party (PS) and formerly of the pseudo-Trotskyist Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), faces an embezzlement investigation into funds he drew on the accounts of anti-racist group SOS-Racism and the FIDL (Independent and Democratic Federation of High School Students). The scandal has brought to public attention the links between protest organisations and the upper echelons of the state apparatus in France.

On December 19, *Le Monde* revealed that Dray, a 53-year-old deputy from the southern Paris suburbs and a top associate of PS 2007 presidential candidate Sérgolène Royal, was under investigation by Tracfin, the anti-money-laundering arm of the finance ministry. It cited a Tracfin report noting "suspicious transfers since January 2006 from the accounts of sponsors of SOS-Racism and the FIDL" to Dray, mainly through Dray's secretarial staff. In the 1980s, Dray was a co-founder of both groups.

Investigators raided Dray's Paris home and, later the same day, the offices of SOS-Racism and the FIDL.

Le Monde wrote, "The suspicious transfers from FIDL, and also the Supporters of SOS-Racism, total €351,027. There were cash withdrawals of €94,350 over three years on the accounts of the Supporters of SOS by a member of [Dray's] office. Checks totaling €127,377 were written on the accounts of FIDL and the Supporters of SOS over the same period, then cashed by Nathalie Fortis (the press representative for both SOS and Dray) and Thomas Persuy (FIDL's financial and administrative director), both authorised to sign for the accounts. Tracfin notes that €102,985 were transferred by Fortis and Persuy to Dray's personal accounts."

Significantly, neither FIDL nor SOS-Racism—the

alleged victims in the affair—criticised Dray's conduct; instead, they came to his defence. An FIDL spokesman said it had learned through the press that its offices "would be investigated in the context of a preliminary investigation into an embezzlement of which we would be the victims." He denounced what he called a "media campaign" to "seriously soil our reputation." SOS-Racism lawyer Dominique Tricaut cited "messy paperwork," but added that "money was not turned away from its legitimate destination. However, I am more than ready to believe that the accounting rules were absolutely no good."

Dray has declined to comment publicly on the case, saying he would speak only to financial investigators. He told the daily *Libération*: "I cannot participate in a public accusation process. I will give evidence and answer questions as requested. For the time being, we contest the stories and the interpretations that have been given until now."

Such assurances are not entirely credible, given Dray's history of involvement in funding scandals. In 1999, Dray's purchase of a watch for €54,000 was mentioned in a corruption investigation into the MNEF (French National Insurance Fund for Students). Last week, the satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné* reported that over the last three years, Dray had spent more than €200,000 on luxury watches, pens, shoes and hotel stays in Monaco.

As these past troubles suggest, however, the allegations against Dray are hardly new or unexpected, and the timing of their release is undoubtedly a political decision. As they surfaced, massive protests by student and working youth were rocking Greece, and governments across Europe were carefully monitoring events there, afraid they could spread to their own countries. In France, the FIDL had called

demonstrations against a planned high school reform.

It is highly probable that the timing of the Dray scandal was designed to discredit the FIDL and to dampen enthusiasm for the protests, serving the interests of the French and European bourgeoisie.

The revelations about Dray, however, also provide a valuable lesson about the politics of SOS-Racism and FIDL. Based on democratic-humanitarian opposition to the social order rather than on class-based opposition to capitalism, such groups are, both figuratively and literally, a credit on which top personnel of the French state draw as they seek to head off political opposition from workers and youth.

Dray's biography in particular shows how these groups, from their creation, served as the political mechanism to integrate radicalised students into the French bourgeois establishment, starting from the post-1968 period.

In 1969, at the age of 16, Dray started his political career inside the Pabloite Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. In 1980, he played a leading role in the creation of UNEF-ID (National Student Union of France—Independent and Democratic). The UNEF-ID was the union of two student groups, the Mouvement d'Action Syndical (MAS—Union Action Movement), led by Dray, and the UNEF-US (UNEF-Union Unity), led by Jean-Christophe Cambadélis of another pseudo-Trotskyist organisation, the OCI (Organisation Communiste Internationaliste). Both were opposed to the Socialist Party-led UNEF (National Student Union of France). Dray served as UNEF-ID's vice-president from 1980 to 1984.

After 10 years inside the LCR, Dray joined the PS in 1982, in the initial years of François Mitterrand's presidency. At the time, a number of LCR and OCI members were leaving their parties to join the PS, with perhaps the most notable examples being Dray, Cambadélis, and Henri Weber (who left the LCR to become a close associate of ex-Prime Minister Laurent Fabius).

Dray's experience as a student union leader served him well in founding other protest organisations. He was a founding member of SOS-Racism in 1984 and served as the association's vice-president for four years. SOS-Racism and members of the UNEF-ID subsequently organised a section of France's high school student activists in the FIDL in 1987, after the

1986 demonstrations against the Devaquet law. Dray also sponsored the feminist group "Ni putes, ni soumises" (Neither prostitutes, nor submissive).

While Dray technically left the leadership of SOS-Racism and the FIDL, the current embezzlement investigation and the reaction of the two organisations makes clear that Dray still exercises considerable influence within them.

Dray proved his usefulness during the 1990 high school student demonstrations, in which he played a double game. While Dray associate Isabelle Thomas was in charge of youth affairs in Mitterrand's government, the FIDL was attempting to organise and restrain the powerful protest movement that broke out against poor conditions in high schools and suburbs. Mitterrand had attended an FIDL congress at Dray's request, and ultimately ended the protests by promising to spend €700 million for high school upkeep.

Dray became a prominent figure in the left wing of the PS, establishing numerous tendencies with other PS lefts: the Socialist Left with Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marie-Noëlle Lienemann in 1988, and the New Socialist Party (NPS) with Vincent Peillon, Arnaud Montebourg and Benoît Hamon in 2002. He advocated a hard-line, law-and-order position and supported then-Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy's Interior Security Law in 2003.

Dray left the NPS in 2003, and in a joint campaign alongside the ruling Gaullist government, helped organise the PS campaign in favor of the European Union constitution in 2005, which was scuttled by the French people's no vote in the referendum. He subsequently became an associate of and advisor to Ségolène Royal, the party's pro-free-market 2007 presidential candidate.



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