

Student killed by fascists in central Paris

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An 18-year-old student and anti-fascist, Clément Méric, was beaten to death by a group of fascist thugs in the afternoon of June 5 near the St. Lazare rail station in central Paris. He was declared brain dead the next day at the La Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital.

Clément Méric arrived late to meet a group of friends at a private sale of casual clothes at a store next to the station. The friends had by chance come across a group of five skinhead thugs, also at the sale, bearing swastika tattoos and T-shirts with Nazi slogans like “white power” and “blood and honour”, which provoked a verbal exchange between the two groups inside the store. Clément and his friends were then attacked with knuckledusters by the thugs outside the store.

The medical examination said the young student died from brutal injuries to the face. A 20-year-old youth employed as a security guard has been charged with deliberate assault resulting in death without premeditation—a lesser charge than manslaughter, which the prosecutor initially sought.

The five suspects are said to be members of the Revolutionary Nationalist Youth (JNR), who serve as marshals for the fascist group Third Way.

Méric was studying at the elite Paris university Sciences Po, where friends said he was “someone whose company everyone enjoyed”. Méric’s former head teacher in Brest, his hometown, said he was a brilliant student and “courteous and respectful of others”.

“He was killed for his ideas”, said a student friend. Méric was in fact a member of the anarchist-influenced AAPB (Paris Suburbs Anti-Fascist Action) group, which has been active in support of the gay marriage law so detested by the parliamentary right-wing UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) and its fascist acolytes. Clément had recovered from leukaemia two years ago.

The Socialist Party (PS) government has launched a

procedure to ban the fascist Third Way and JNR held responsible for the killing. The JNR was founded in 1987 and was revived in 2010 by skinhead Serge Ayoub, nicknamed “Batskin” in the 1980s for his regular use of baseball bats on leftist opponents.

According to the daily *Le Figaro*, the JNR “consists of about 30 members, all skinheads and very muscular, dressed in black, some of them with impressive tattoos”. Their slogan, copied from Mussolini’s fascists in Italy, is “Believe, Obey, Combat”. They march “every year (on the second weekend of May) in a very martial style, in line and in step, through Rivoli Street in Paris along with other groups of the extreme radical right”, the paper notes.

Rallies to protest against the killing of Clément Méric and honour his memory were held in several major cities throughout France on June 6. A gathering of friends and supporters of “left” parties took place in the St. Michel quarter of Paris and angrily rejected attempts by the Socialist Party and the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon to speak for Méric’s ideas.

Méric’s friends and supporters also barred the UMP candidate for mayor of Paris, Nathalie Kosciusko Morizet, from joining the gathering, as well as the PS candidate Anne Hidalgo, who was shunned with calls of “PS get off the rally, Socialist traitors”.

Harlem Désir, the PS national secretary and former leader of SOS Racism, abandoned his participation at the last minute due to Méric’s supporters’ hostility to anti-immigrant policies of the PS.

The PS, along with its pseudo-left supporters, indeed carries the main responsibility for the growth of extreme right-wing tendencies in France and the growing self-confidence of fascist forces.

Given the complete absence of a genuine left-wing alternative, the austerity imposed by the government of President François Hollande—and the social and economic devastation it has caused—have been

exploited by the extreme right.

In a recent by-election in the Oise department, PS candidate Sylvie Houssin was beaten into third place by the National Front, which lost by just 800 votes to the conservative UMP. The PS only received the support of 12.5 percent of registered voters. President Hollande's popularity rating has fallen to 28 percent with further attacks on pensions to be announced this week.

A section of the conservative UMP has mobilised the fears and insecurity of backward rural elements behind an anti-gay marriage movement, attracting and further strengthening ultra right-wing forces.

The PS government and its interior minister, Manuel Valls, have themselves played a major role in feeding fascist sentiment through the witch-hunting of immigrants and Muslim women for wearing the veil and the burqa. In this they were fully supported by the pseudo-left Lutte Ouvrière and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA).

All this has emboldened fascist gangs like the JNR and encouraged them to attack their opponents in broad daylight.

Unable to address the social and political roots behind the fascist threat, the PS and its pseudo-left supporters are relying on the state to dissolve violent, far-right groups. Interior Minister Valls claimed, "We have to fight these sickening ideas," saying, "This type of movement is re-emerging; we have to combat them with the rule of law."

The Left Front (combining Mélenchon's Left Party and the French Communist Party) has also demanded the banning of the fascist groups.

Benjamin Abtan, president of the European Grassroots Movement Against Racism, told the *New Statesman*, "It is a democratic necessity to ban far-right groups responsible for the murder of Clément".

In fact, such a ban would inevitably serve as a pretext for the state-suppression of left-wing opponents of capitalism. This was bluntly spelled out by UMP leader Jean-François Copé, who called for the extension of the ban to "extreme left" groups as well.

The student union to which Méric belonged, Union Syndicale Solidaires, expressed its anger against the killing and warned against "the climate of hate sustained by the political speeches that stigmatise and are not exclusive to the National Front and fascist groups." But it avoided mentioning the climate

engendered by the PS government and Left Front's support for legislation against the Muslim veil and undocumented immigrants, a PS government for which all the pseudo-left groups voted.

Clément Méric was instinctively hostile to these forces. If more attacks against socialist-minded youth and workers are to be avoided, this can only be done on the basis of a mass mobilisation of the working class on a socialist perspective.



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