

French Socialist Party covered up its role in police murder of Rémi Fraisse

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On Wednesday, *Le Monde* and *Médiapart* published court documents showing that riot police were well aware they had killed 21-year-old ecological activist Rémi Fraisse at a protest against the controversial Sivens Dam in the Tarn area of southern France the night of October 25-26. This shows that initial statements by the ruling Socialist Party (PS), which told riot police to crack down hard on the protest, were a cover-up of its responsibility for Fraisse's murder.

The court document contains a transcript of a video recording of police on the site during the clashes, making clear that police knew it was their grenade that killed Fraisse. Nonetheless, PS interior minister Bernard Cazeneuve remained silent for 48 hours after Fraisse's death. The video and transcript show:

* Between 1:40 and 1:50 a.m.: The riot police, equipped with night-vision goggles, saw a protester collapse just after they threw an offensive grenade at a group of protesters, including Fraisse.

* 1:53 a.m.: a policeman ordered to stop firing concussion grenades after seeing Fraisse fall to the ground. A policeman says, "He's over there, the guy. OK, we leave him for a while." Later, he says, "It's OK, he'll get up! He'll get up, it's OK."

* 2:00 a.m.: As Fraisse is still on the ground, the police approach him. A senior officer asks: "Is he breathing or what?" while a medic tries to revive him.

* 2:03 a.m.: Another says, "He's died, the guy.... Now, it's really serious.... They can't know."

Contacted by *Le Monde* Tuesday, police spokesmen stated that in the last remark, "they" refers to the protesters, noting: "We had to avoid a situation where those attacking the police would attack even harder after learning of Rémi Fraisse's death."

These revelations expose the contradictory remarks by state authorities—who claimed that it was impossible

to immediately determine the cause of Fraisse's death—as lies.

In the morning of October 26, the Tarn police chief released a statement giving the impression that Fraisse's body was discovered by chance during a patrol, and making no connection to police action: "A man's body was found on the night of Saturday to Sunday on the site of the controversial dam at Sivens (Tarn), where clashes took place during a protest."

After Fraisse's death, Interior Minister Cazeneuve said that "the body of a young man has been found," without saying how he had been killed.

Even after autopsy results showed that Fraisse was killed by fragments of a concussion grenade fired by riot police, Cazeneuve defended police, saying: "No, it was not excessive brutality, we cannot present things that way!"

Denis Favier, director general of the National Gendarmerie and a close ally of Prime Minister Manuel Valls, has defended his troops, however, denying that they had made a mistake that night and stressing that they informed their superiors. On Saturday, he told *Le Parisien*: "The events took place at 1:40 a.m., the judicial system was informed at 2:00 and our local judiciary police barely a half hour later."

The political responsibility for Fraisse's killing lies squarely with the deeply discredited PS government. As part of its broader strategy of banning and cracking down on all protests against its unpopular pro-business and pro-war policies, it demanded that police brutally repress the Sivens protesters, setting the stage for the killing.

According to *Médiapart*, "The head of the mobile police detachment from Limoges, which was operating at Sivens on October 26, declared in his report that the Tarn police chief had requested that they show

‘extreme firmness.’ ”

Yesterday, however, Cazeneuve said he had given no such order: “Were there orders from me calling for firmness in a tense context? I gave the opposite instructions, and I repeat this.”

Cazeneuve’s claim that his orders were countermanded raises the question of direct involvement at the highest levels—by the prime minister or the president—in giving the orders that led to Fraisse’s murder. Yesterday, *Libération* cited an anonymous PS official who asked: “If the order to be firm did not come from Cazeneuve but the police chief received one, who gave the order?” *Libération* replied to the question, writing: “Behind the interior minister, certain people are now aiming for Manuel Valls.... The fact that the Gendarmerie today is led by an officer who served on his staff in 2012-2013 when he was interior minister does nothing to calm those who believe the prime minister is employing a ‘strategy of tension.’ ”

The murder of Fraisse is a warning to the working class. The government and the pseudo-left parties that called for the election of PS president François Hollande two years ago will order and sanction the most brutal methods to repress workers and youth protesting the PS’s reactionary policies. The murder of Fraisse is being used to establish a precedent for using deadly force to crack down on social protest in France.

According to official documents cited by *Médiapart*, riot police fired more than 700 grenades on the night of Fraisse’s murder, including 42 offensive grenades.

Significantly, the 2011 law authorising police to fire these grenades at protesters also allows police to fire live ammunition at protesters. The law states that “firearms can be used by the police forces for the maintenance of public order,” if police declare that they are under “fire.” The law specifies that 7.62-mm bullets should be used.



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