

Trial starts five years after fascist murder of French student Clément Méric

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It took the state five years to bring to trial the three nationalist skinheads implicated in the June 5, 2013, murder of anti-fascist student Clément Méric. Two face charges of voluntary violence involuntarily leading to death, a less serious charge than that of involuntary homicide initially demanded by the Paris prosecutor, a third of having participated in the fight. The trial started on Tuesday and is expected to close today.

Last week, outside the Judicial Palace in Paris, anti-fascist demonstrators called for official recognition of the political character of the murder. A friend of Méric told *Libération*: “Clément was killed because he was an anti-fascist. It was not a fight between rival gangs, as the defense has been claiming since the beginning.”

The state and the media are, for their part, giving political cover to the killers of Méric and to the broader neo-fascist milieu. As the ruling class seeks to “demonize” neo-fascists like Marine Le Pen and similar politicians across Europe, a veil of silence is drawn over the fact that, as in the 1970s, the ruling class is preparing in neo-fascist circles a layer of thugs to attack or kill left-wing youth.

They attacked Méric, a student at the Political Sciences school and member of the Solidarity-Student union and Antifascist Action-Paris Suburbs, and his comrades outside near a metro station. In a clothing store, his friends had previously encountered skinheads with swastika tattoos and sweatshirts bearing Nazi slogans, including “White Power” and “Blood and Honor.” Clément Méric, who had arrived later, died after being violently struck in the face.

The exceptionally long, five-year delay between a homicide that was recorded on video and the beginning of the trial can be explained only by political considerations. Several far-right groups tied to the neo-fascist National Front and French intelligence are

implicated in the killing, which took place as François Hollande’s Socialist Party (PS) government was moving closer to the neo-fascists and preparing to invite Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace.

The intelligence and police forces were under no real pressure to develop the inquiry and proceed to trial. Indeed, the three youth implicated in the killing were members of the Third Way group and its security organization, the Nationalist Revolutionary youth (JNR), founded by Serge Ayoub and dissolved after Méric’s death. But many sources have reported that Ayoub is closely linked to French domestic intelligence.

Indeed, the presiding judge had to suspend the trial on the first day due to the absence of one of the two principal accused, Samuel Dufour. It emerged later that police had met with Dufour, supposedly to check his identity papers, and thus prevented the trial from starting at the scheduled time.

At the trial, the defense largely had a free pass to downplay the neo-fascist politics of the accused. Though they had pictures of Hitler on their phones, the defense tried to portray them as youth who were politically lost and ignorant. One of them, Esteban Morillo, claimed he did not know that the Vichy regime’s slogan “Work-Family-Homeland,” which he has tattooed on his body, is linked to the Nazi collaboration.

The proceedings have focused since on whether Morillo was wearing brass knuckles when he struck the fatal blow against Méric. The dubious judicial rationale is that if the neo-fascists did not wear brass knuckles to kill Méric, the fight was just a violent dispute.

According to Morillo’s lawyer, Patrick Maisonneuve, “For us the use of brass knuckles is the issue. My client, Esteban Morillo, immediately admitted that he

struck two blows to Clément Méric including the one that made him fall down, but he has always denied having had a weapon. And if he was fighting bare-handed, it was simply a fight and not a punitive expedition. That changes the nature of the affair, both of the two groups would then be defending themselves.”

This echoes positions advanced by police over the last several years in legal proceedings to keep Murillo and Dufour from coming to trial. The technical police analyzed a video of the fight that shows Murillo punching Méric, but it declared from 2013 on that it is “too fuzzy” to show whether Murillo had brass knuckles.

Police ignored eyewitness reports who said Murillo was wearing brass knuckles, as well as text messages found in 2014 on the neo-fascists’ phones boasting that they had used brass knuckles to hit Méric.

They had also been in contact with Serge Ayoub just before killing Méric. Remarkably, however, the courts gave Ayoub a medical dispensation so he would not have to appear at the trial. This extraordinary decision highlights the abnormal character of the trial and the political cover the courts are giving the neo-fascists.

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Contacted about his medical dispensation by vice.com, Ayoub reportedly replied by “vociferously shouting insults and cussing at a high decibel level,” telling the journalists: “Go f*ck yourselves. You’re an as*hole. On your gravestone, it will be marked ‘As*hole.’” The online magazine added, “Rumor has it that he is an informant for the security services. This rumor is widely echoed by the anti-fascist milieu, without ever having been proven. A former policeman confirmed it to us, anonymously. But again he did not provide proof.”

This trial highlights the reactionary character of the political forces promoted by the previous PS government’s state of emergency and then by current President Emmanuel Macron. By suspending democratic rights and giving free rein to police, inviting Le Pen to the Elysée, and proposing to inscribe the Vichy policy of deprivation of nationality, implicated in the Holocaust, in the French constitution, the PS was sending a signal to the far right. The ruling class considers now that their political and historical

positions are legitimate and politically necessary.

This toxic atmosphere allowed the ruling class to impose the reactionary PS labor law and Macron’s related labor decrees, brutally repressing anti-labor law protests in 2016, to fund a major increase in military spending. Now, these measures serve as a pseudo-legal foundation for imposing in France the austerity and militaristic agenda that the ruling class is implementing across Europe.

The ruling class also could depend on the cowardly role of the organizations that oversaw Méric’s political activity. At the Political Sciences school and elsewhere, many youth remember Méric’s murder; during this spring’s university occupation, his school was briefly renamed the Clément Méric Institute. But the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), the party affiliated to the Solidarity student group where Méric was a member, treated the murder differently.

Despite the broad media coverage given to the NPA’s presidential candidate Philippe Poutou last year, the party did not campaign to bring Méric’s killers to trial or expose the fascist danger his murder revealed. Thus, the NPA and its allies adapted themselves to the bourgeoisie’s campaign to promote the neo-fascists.

Coming after the murder of anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer in Charlottesville and the exposure of the far-right NSU murders in Germany, Méric’s death is a warning to the workers in France and internationally. Macron and the police will not stop the rising far-right violence, in which they are complicit and from which they profit politically. The way forward is to mobilize a movement of the working class, independently of the bankrupt pseudo-left groups, against fascist reaction, austerity and militarism.



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