

French far-right tough defends fascist murder of Méric: “He asked for it!”

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19 September 2018

Shortly before the end of the trial last Friday of the three neo-Nazis who fatally assaulted anti-fascist Clément Méric in 2013, Serge Ayoub, the leader of the dissolved neo-fascist groups Third Way and Nationalist Revolutionary Youth (JNR) to which the three neo-Nazis belonged, was called to testify. Ayoub, who has close ties to domestic intelligence according to police sources, was in contact with the three accused before and after Méric’s murder.

Asked to attend the week before, he produced a medical certificate and declined to appear, while unleashing a wave of commentary on the trial, denouncing Méric as an “aggressor.” Ayoub also tried to blame Méric’s death on the disease from which he had recently recovered: “Cruel Nature reminded him that he suffered from leukaemia. In 1914, in the trenches, there were no access ramps for the handicapped.”

Finally forced to appear before the court despite the initially tolerant treatment from police, Ayoub made explosive statements, underscoring that the fascist murder of Méric was a deliberate political act, committed in close connection to powerful forces in the police and state machine.

On the witness stand, Ayoub politically defended the murder. After insulting Méric’s memory by comparing him to a house burglar who dies falling from a balcony while fleeing police, Ayoub shouted out about Méric’s murder: “He asked for it!”

Ayoub tried to deny the neo-fascist and pro-colonialist character of his organisations, in a manner lacking any credibility. He claimed that the “Work, Family, Homeland” slogan of the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime of Philippe Pétain, which the principal accused, Esteban Morillo, had tattooed on his right arm, “cannot be linked to Pétain any more than one can

connect ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ to colonialism.”

As for the Nazi swastika, he told the court and the family and friends of the murdered man, “for these boys ... it’s just a way of saying ‘go f*ck yourself.’ It is not anything more serious than that.”

About his own role in the murder, Ayoub claimed he had gotten a call from the ex-girlfriend of Morillo and advised the young skinheads “to go ahead, to get them out of the way. ... They called me back just afterwards to say there was just a little pushing and shoving. I said all the better. All that was just kid’s play.” Later on that night, when he heard that Clément Méric had died, Ayoub called Morillo back: “I told him that he was really in the sh*t, I started really asking them precisely what had happened.” He claimed that he advised them to “give themselves up.”

Ayoub admitted that he then “tried to call the police prefecture” and speak to a “contact I speak to for demonstrations” to say that the “boys” would turn themselves in, but not without a lawyer. He said he told his police contact that for young people who beat Méric to death, “going there alone would mean being crushed.”

Remarkably, neither the judges nor the press tried to discover who Ayoub’s contacts were in the police prefecture or more broadly in the state apparatus.

It remains unclear who Ayoub was trying to call, who he actually reached, and precisely what type of protection he was seeking from the prefecture. This underscores that the trial has not asked, much less solved, the basic political questions raised by the murder. It is a judicial operation aimed to obscure what happened on the day of the killing, and thus to hide the political, and potentially criminal, responsibility of many officials and political figures in Méric’s death.

Ayoub’s testimony further raises the question of just

what role he and his fascistic organization in fact play for the Paris police prefecture during demonstrations.

This vindicates the points raised by the WSWS at the beginning of the trial. The state and the media are offering political cover for Méric's killers and to the broader French neo-fascist milieu. The exceptionally long, five-year delay between a homicide that was recorded on videotape and the beginning of the trial can only be explained based on political considerations. Far-right groups close to Marine Le Pen's National Front and to French domestic intelligence are implicated in the killing, which occurred as the Socialist Party (PS) government tried to "de-demonize" the FN, notably by inviting Le Pen for talks with President François Hollande.

Ayoub's record and his close ties to the police underscore that the political forces promoted by the PS's state of emergency, imposed in 2015 and then overseen first by Hollande and then by President Emmanuel Macron, recall the darkest hours of French history.

Ayoub was very active during the 1980s in the skinhead group known as "the Klan" and was nicknamed "Batskin" for his frequent use of baseball bats to assault his opponents. The son of a magistrate, he founded the JNR in 1987 and began studies at University of Paris-VI.

During the 1990s, he was less politically active, did nine months in jail for trafficking steroids (he was also arrested during a bikers' festival for possession of methamphetamines), and claims to have worked in El Salvador, Lithuania and Russia. His name appeared in several other homicide cases involving young JNR members or sympathizers. Ayoub was never convicted, however.

"Ayoub is the man who is always one phone call away from the murder, but who always gets off scot-free!" said one friend of Méric during the trial.

In October 2010, Ayoub founded "Third Way for a solidarist vanguard" with the aim of "entering into the trade union milieu." He also reactivated the JNR. As in the 1960s and 1970s, the ruling class was preparing within the neo-fascist scene a layer of thugs to assault and, if need be, kill left-wing youth and workers.

After the Méric killing, facing demands for the dissolution of the JNR and Third Way, he dissolved both groups.

But the official political climate in France was not favourable to an investigation of the murder, because the entire ruling class was preparing a broad shift towards the far right. The neo-Nazis who had assaulted Méric were released and, two years later, France entered into a state of emergency.

By suspending democratic rights and giving full powers to the police, inviting Marine Le Pen to the Elysée presidential palace to speak to Hollande, and trying to inscribe the penalty of deprivation of nationality, used during the Holocaust, in the French constitution, the PS and Hollande were sending a signal to the far right. The ruling class now considered that far-right positions were legitimate and necessary.

The stage was being set for unprecedented social attacks on the working class, with the PS labour law and the related labour decrees of Macron, by brutally repressing mass demonstrations against the labour law in 2016. The PS government even threatened to ban social protests to pressure the unions to strangle the movement. Now, the labour law serves as the pseudo-legal foundation for the imposition in France of the policies of militarism and austerity that predominate across Europe.

Ayoub's statements on the witness stand are a warning to the workers and youth in France and beyond. The deepening ties of the state to neo-Nazi groups are part of a fundamental shift in class relations, as ever broader sections of the ruling class see deadly force as a legitimate response to opponents of their politics, such as Clément Méric.



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