

# Back to Vichy

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There is a stench of fascism arising from the anti-immigrant, law-and-order measures being implemented by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Policies and methods which people had hoped were forever left behind in the 1930s and 1940s are being revived by the European bourgeoisie in an attempt to deal with the consequences of the global economic crisis.

There is no clearer example than the mass deportations of Roma, a population once targeted for extermination by the Nazis. They and their collaborators killed between 250,000 and 500,000 Roma. The French collaborationist Vichy authorities raided Roma communities and held their inhabitants in concentration camps such as Jargeau, near Orléans.

While European governments do not yet encourage anti-Semitism, in part due to popular awareness of the Holocaust, they encourage and exploit anti-Roma hatred.

Other measures proposed by Sarkozy also borrow directly from the legal arsenal of fascism. Having moved to ban the burqa, the government aims to strip French citizenship from naturalized citizens who clash with the police. It is also threatening parents of juvenile delinquents with jail time if their children violate restrictions placed upon them by the justice system.

The last time France revoked citizens' nationality for non-capital crimes was under the Vichy regime, which took away 7,000 Jews' citizenship. Holding families criminally responsible for actions of their members, the Nazis' *Sippenhaft* policy, has been condemned as barbaric since the collapse of the Third Reich.

While Roma and burqa-wearing women are first in the government's line of fire, its ultimate target is opposition to austerity and war by the entire working class.

The government has looted the economy in the interests of the financial aristocracy. Having orchestrated a €360 billion handout to the banks and

allegedly taken campaign contributions from billionaire Liliane Bettencourt while helping her evade taxes, Sarkozy is pressing ahead with pension and budget cuts. The press is also calling for France to boost its military spending, anticipating broader wars in the Middle East and Asia.

Sarkozy's measures are a preparation to meet social opposition to these policies with violent repression. This is endorsed by the entire political establishment. The bourgeois "left's" criticisms are largely from the right. The Socialist Party and its allies pose as more skilled administrators of the police than Sarkozy.

The particular measures Sarkozy is proposing suggest that he anticipates a clash with youth in impoverished suburban estates, largely populated by immigrant families. The government is preparing to respond with mass jailings and deportations. When such riots broke out in 2005, then-President Jacques Chirac imposed a three-month state of emergency. Sarkozy, as interior minister, demanded that foreigners participating in the riots be deported.

The situation is broadly similar in countries around the world. European governments have widely incited anti-Muslim sentiment, often under the guise of defending women's rights. National burqa bans have passed or are under consideration in Belgium, France, Italy and Denmark, and by local authorities in Spain. Last year, a Swiss referendum banned the construction of minarets. The far-reaching, reactionary implications of such measures, which paved the way for the current right-wing campaign in France, are now becoming apparent.

In Italy, which is also deporting Roma, Interior Minister Roberto Maroni applauded Sarkozy's measures and repeated a proposal to expel citizens of other European Union countries who cannot support themselves. This policy was previously struck down by the European Commission (EC). However, the EC now

endorses Sarkozy's far-right measures. EC spokesman Matthew Newman has stated that the commission does not consider the French government's large-scale expulsions of Roma to meet the criteria for a "mass expulsion."

In the United States, there is an ongoing legal battle over an Arizona state law allowing police to arrest anyone who fails to show documents proving he or she is not an "illegal" immigrant. The law, which would pave the way for mass deportations, including of legal immigrants, is the outcome of a decades-long promotion of xenophobia and chauvinism by forces within the Democratic as well as the Republican Party, and within the trade union bureaucracy.

Now the plan to build an Islamic community center two blocks from the World Trade Center buildings destroyed in the 9/11 attacks has become the occasion for a fascistic campaign against Muslims.

The bourgeoisie's moves towards police-state rule are a serious warning to the working class. The defense of democratic rights as well as working class living standards is possible only through the independent mobilization of the working class in a struggle for workers' power and socialism.

In this regard, the intervention in France's 2002 presidential elections by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) is a critical experience. Unlike the Pabloite Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, which oriented its politics to a section of the ruling class, the ICFI has seen its positions thoroughly vindicated.

France's 2002 presidential elections produced a second round run-off between Chirac and neo-fascist Front National candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. As mass demonstrations spread throughout France, the ICFI called for a working class boycott of the election as the best means to fight for a break with all of the bourgeois parties and the development of an independent political movement of the working class. The LCR, instead, effectively backed Chirac, calling for a vote "against Le Pen" as the only way to halt the slide towards fascism.

This perspective of an alliance with a section of the ruling class against neo-fascism has proven completely bankrupt. The LCR's support helped give Chirac's Gaullist party a progressive veneer, paving the way for

Chirac, and then Sarkozy, to impose a series of social cuts against the workers, with the tacit support of the trade unions and the bourgeois "left." Now, as Sarkozy seeks to deepen his attacks, he is adopting the very policies advocated by Le Pen which, the LCR claimed, a vote for the Gaullists would prevent.

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