

Thousands protest in France vs. witch-hunt of Roma

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Some 100,000 people joined demonstrations Saturday in 140 French towns to protest against President Nicolas Sarkozy's anti-immigrant and repressive policies and his crackdown on Roma communities. Minister of the Interior Brice Hortefeux issued a statement in response, declaring, "I will press on with my determined action to drive back all forms of delinquency and defend victims' rights, and I will do this without stigmatising any community whatsoever."

Sarkozy's conservative Gaullist government is in profound crisis. The president's approval rating is hovering around 30 percent and some 70 percent of the population has expressed support for the day of action to be held September 7 in opposition to the government's austerity policies.

Sporadic strikes and workplace occupations have taken place throughout the year in opposition to sackings, closures and wage cuts, while corruption scandals have mushroomed involving former Gaullist President Jacques Chirac, Sarkozy and Sarkozy's labour minister, Eric Woerth.

In a speech in Grenoble on July 31 following riots sparked by police killings of a young Roma and an immigrant youth in two separate incidents, Sarkozy pledged to demolish all illegal Roma camps and revoke the French nationality of immigrants for a long list of misdemeanors. The revocation of nationality is widely recognised as harking back to the Vichy régime of Marshal Philippe Pétain, which collaborated with the Nazi occupation during World War II. The quisling government stripped 15,000 naturalised French citizens of their nationality and went on to deport thousands of Jews and other "undesirables," including gypsies, to

the Nazi death camps.

Sarkozy's lurch to the right, contrary to his intentions, has done nothing to restore his ratings.

The demonstrations were called by the Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist-influenced CGT (General Confederation of Labour), and supported by the French Communist Party (PCF), the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) of Olivier Besancenot. All of these organizations are, in fact, implicated in efforts to whip up anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic prejudice.

They gave either open or tacit support to the Islamophobic campaign which led to the 2004 banning of the Muslim headscarf in public schools and the prohibition against wearing the burqa in public this year.. None support the call by undocumented workers on Saturday's demonstration for the legalisation of all so-called "illegal" immigrants.

The politics of the demonstrations were dominated by the PS and its satellite organisations and subservient to the electoral aspirations of the party. The Socialist Party sought to present itself as a defender of democratic rights and a bulwark against fascism.

The PS published a discussion document last Tuesday penned by former prime minister Laurent Fabius and his deputy, Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, confirming the imperialist nature of this bourgeois party. It defended France's nuclear armoury, demanded a halt to cuts in military funding and called for French and European Union armed forces capable of intervening throughout the world, including in Afghanistan.

The PS supports austerity measures to reduce the country's deficit and defend the euro. The presence of many French flags on the demonstration, purporting to emphasise the democratic values of the Fifth Republic,

highlighted the nationalist orientation of the organisers.

A *Médiapart* roundup of the protests in the provinces reported that in some towns, such as Avignon, PS officials were conspicuous by their absence. François Rebsamen, the former aide to PS candidate Ségolène Royal in the 2007 presidential election, warned in *Le Parisien* on Friday against supporting “associations like the League for Human Rights,” saying: “Watch out ! Don’t get sucked in. The PS is a party of government. Let’s not lose sight of that... Don’t let this type of demonstration go so far as to ask our mayors and municipal representatives to set up Roma camps in our towns or turn a blind eye to certain squatters.”

The demonstrations brought together parties from across the political spectrum, from the fake “left” NPA to parties and figures of the establishment right. Supporters of former prime minister Dominique de Villepin’s new Gaullist party République Solidaire demonstrated, as did right-wing MoDem Euro MP Corinne Lepage, who declared on the demonstration, “I find the plans concerning the revocation of nationality very serious. As far as concerns the Roma, I consider that where there is illegality, the law should be applied.”

Alain Juppé, a long-standing Sarkozy supporter and former prime minister, currently the mayor of Bordeaux, did not march in his town alongside the trade unions and the “left” parties, but his deputy Véronique Fayet did.

Since Sarkozy’s Grenoble speech, over 100 Roma camps have been dismantled and 1,000 Roma have been deported. The Socialist Party and its allies have carried out no campaign against these daily manhunts and roundups. Indeed, PS mayors, including Martine Aubry, mayor of Lille, have sent the police to evict Roma and dismantle their camps.

In Paris, supporters of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) distributed copies of the *World Socialist Web Site* statement “Back to Vichy.”

There were no banners, placards or leaflets on the Paris march opposing the war in Iraq and France’s participation in the neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan. Apart from one feminist group’s leaflet, there were no statements of opposition to the law

forbidding the wearing of the burqa in public.

Nicky, a student at Lille University, told the WSWS, “Sarkozy is trying to distract the attention of the population away from economic and social problems and the Bettencourt corruption scandal.”

Théo, who is studying music at the Sorbonne in Paris, said: “I’m on the demo to oppose the anti-Roma declaration of Sarkozy. The government’s procedure is to stigmatise the Roma population, going from an isolated case to a generalisation of them all. It’s the old law-and-order method to win back the votes of the far right.

“The expulsion of the Roma does not make sense when they are citizens of the EU. In some respects, I am for the free movement of immigrants anywhere. The attack on the Roma is an admission of failure on the part of the government and the left municipalities, which have not fulfilled their legal obligations to provide sites for them to live. I hope the PS and PCF are for the defense of workers’ democratic rights, but they have not evolved and do not have a perspective different from that of globalisation and capitalism, to which they adapt.”



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