

Marseille mayor orders mass expulsion of Roma camp

Kumaran Ira
11 August 2011

On August 9, the city of Marseille in southern France announced that it had prepared a municipal order to forcibly evacuate some 100 Roma people, of whom one third are children. The Roma had settled in a makeshift camp in the Porte d'Aix area, after they were evicted from squats a month ago.

The decision was taken in an atmosphere of deep racist prejudice against the Roma. Prior to the approval of his court order, last Friday, Gaudin collectively denounced them: "Such people, there are too many of them in this city, we want them to go elsewhere."

The order was prepared at the request of Marseille's conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) mayor, Jean-Claude Gaudin. The administrative tribunal approved his request, which asked the tribunal "to order their expulsion with the assistance of the security forces, under penalty of a €500 fine for each late day."

The Roma people were given a 24-hour delay to clear out their camps in the gardens surrounding the Porte d'Aix, a triumphal arch in Marseille).

The lawyer for the deported Roma people, Dany Cohen, attacked Gaudin's decision: "Instead of beginning expulsion proceedings, it would be better to find a place for them to stay and something to eat... Administrative judges are being asked to throw out human beings, to force them go elsewhere so they will not be seen."

The 100 Roma targeted for expulsion had been living for nearly a month without water or electricity after being expelled from their squats. It is estimated that there are some 1,500 Roma people living permanently in unsanitary camps in the Marseille area.

The conservative government of President Nicolas Sarkozy has been pursuing a policy of harassing or expelling France's Roma population, as part of Sarkozy's broader campaign to divide the working class along ethnic lines and divert popular opposition to his wars and austerity measures behind anti-immigrant hatred. These included also a flagrantly anti-democratic and unconstitutional ban on wearing the burqa in public in France.

Just a year ago, Sarkozy's government deported more than 10,000 Roma people to Romania and Bulgaria after he called for dismantling Roma camps throughout France. At that time, his policy was criticised by some European official, and it was even compared with the treatment of Jews during the second world war (See "European leaders disavow criticism of France's Roma deportations").

European officials rapidly backed down, however, and since then, the government has intensified its attacks against the Roma.

The government's anti-immigrant campaign and its targeted expulsion of Roma people are possible only due to the complicity of the bourgeois "left"—the Socialist Party and its allies such as the PCF (French Communist Party). The bourgeois "left" parties and pseudo-left organisations like the NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) made no attempt to challenge Sarkozy's anti-democratic measures, and even participated in promoting the burqa ban. They have created the political atmosphere in which Sarkozy's racist attacks could proceed.

In its critical examination of Sarkozy's deportation policy published last month, *Médecin du Monde*

(MdM) said: “The crackdown had led to a big rise in pressure and intimidation from the police, firebomb attacks on gypsy sites and the spread of disease within the community. Campaigners have warned of an intensification of camp clearances in the summer months.”

Condemning government’s inhuman treatment of Roma in Marseille, the executive director of the MdM, Pierre Salignon, said: “Our staff faces particular difficulties in Marseille, given the human situations they encounter. Everything leads us to believe that there is a somewhat out of control functioning of fairly systematic police harassment.”

This has had a devastating impact on the situation of the Roma. Commenting on worst sanitary situation faced by Roma people, Jean-François Corty, head of French operations at Médecins du Monde, said: “The rate of incidents of tuberculosis in the Roma camps has reached 2.5 percent as people are forced to move from site to site in ever more squalid conditions. A few years ago it was near the French average of 0.03 percent of the population.”

As a result of government’s harassment of Roma population, Europe’s largest ethnic minority, adults have lost their jobs, children’s schooling has been disrupted, and they have been denied access to basic necessities.

Sarkozy’s policy of targeting Roma, immigrants, and Muslims is part of the UMP’s broader attempt of gaining support from the electorate of the neo-fascistic National Front (FN). Gaudin in particular has run the regional government of Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur (PACA), the region surrounding Marseille, with the support of FN officials.

The UMP now attacks the Roma all the more desperately, in that Sarkozy’s ratings are collapsing in the polls, and that his policies have led to broader acceptance of the FN in the political and media establishment. As a result, they facing rising pressure from the FN to carry out even more ruthless attacks, notably stepping up mass deportations.

In Marseille, Gaudin is pressing his ultra-right anti-immigrant campaign to avoid being outflanked on the

right by the FN, whose officials are demanding further attacks on immigrants.

On August 9, French Interior Minister Claude Guéant said that total immigrant expulsions would reach 30,000 by the end of 2011—2,000 more than the previous target figure of 28,000. He told Europe1, “During the first seven months of the year, we deported 17,500 foreigners, 4 percent more than in 2010.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact