

French Socialist Party presidential candidate calls for interning the Roma

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24 February 2012

In a February 12 interview on Canal Plus TV, François Hollande, Socialist Party candidate for president in the upcoming elections, proposed as a “solution” to the presence in France of Roma European Union (EU) citizens “the creation of camps ... to accommodate them”.

The association of a “solution” in relation to specific racial groups with special camps can only bring to mind the period of Nazi rule in Europe, during which not only Jews and homosexuals, but also Roma and gypsies were rounded up and sent to extermination camps. This was not lost on many French people.

Hollande called for the establishment of “European rules to avoid our experiencing this constant to and fro [of the Roma]. Let there be camps that we can decide on, that is, to avoid these people settling just anywhere ... [to] enable these people to go back to Romania ... and not then return to France”.

Put more concretely, the Roma would be rounded up, and after their improvised encampments were broken up, they would be sent back to Romania, the same policy the present right-wing government of President Nicolas Sarkozy is pursuing.

The “Socialist” Hollande’s innovation is to suggest the building of internment camps and then preventing the Roma from returning by some sort of frontier control. Hollande is here attacking the free movement within the EU of these European citizens, one of the few progressive measures European capitalism temporarily conceded in the Schengen agreement in 1985.

Ruling UMP (Union for a Popular Majority) deputies pounced on Hollande’s statement to justify the brutality of the government’s current policy. On RTL radio, minister for apprenticeship Nadine Morano, a rabid racist, claimed that she was “profoundly

shocked” by this “outlandish proposal ... We [the government] were the ones who organised the dismantling of the Roma camps with legal procedures, in accordance with French law”, while “Mr. Hollande is proposing the creation of camps for Roma in France.”

An estimated 12,000 to 15,000 Roma, citizens of Romania and Bulgaria, have legally come to France since their countries joined the European Union in 2007. According to the BBC, ten other EU countries, including Germany, Italy, Denmark and Sweden, which also welcomed Roma, are likewise introducing deportation policies. Measures adopted by a number of European states, including France, limit access to work and residence rights for Romanian and Bulgarian migrants until December 12, 2013, when the restrictions will end. It is clear that Hollande would not want to end these restrictions but, rather, extend and reinforce them.

It is difficult to distinguish Hollande’s statements from Sarkozy’s infamous Grenoble speech of June 30, 2010: “We’ll examine the rights and welfare entitlements, currently available to foreigners living in suspiciously irregular circumstances.... The general rule is clear: illegals must be directed back to their own countries”, said Sarkozy. He had already asked the interior minister “to put an end to unauthorized gypsy settlements. These are lawless zones not to be tolerated in France”.

EU commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding accused the Sarkozy government of “discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin or race” and of calling into question “the common values and laws of our European Union”. She described the French policy as a “disgrace”. She implicitly compared the actions of the French

government with those of the fascists during the Second World War. In the event, she backed down and Sarkozy has been able to continue with this “disgrace”.

Hollande is currently justifying Socialist Party-dominated town councils’ current practice in relation to Roma settlements. *Essonne Info* reported that on February 13, his campaign manager Manuel Valls, mayor of Evry, “by a mayoral municipal decree ... called on the *préfet* [police chief] to clear by force the children and their parents and bulldoze their encampment”. There is no report that the mayor offered them alternative accommodation.

Discussion about the closing of frontiers between EU countries flared up in 2011, when Tunisian refugees fleeing state repression and devastated living conditions through Italy were prevented by the French government from crossing the Italian border, where they were legal, into France where many had family and friends.

The announcement of Hollande’s Roma “solution” came only days after the controversy created by Martinique deputy Serge Latchimi, who said that minister of the interior Claude Guéant’s comment that some civilisations were superior to others was close to Nazism. Hollande refused to support Latchimi’s position.

Hollande is appealing to the most backward elements in French society and distancing himself from wide layers of the population deeply opposed to the brutality of the state’s attacks on fundamental human rights.

When accused of being “soft” on illegal immigrants, Hollande likes to cite his election programme: “I will conduct an implacable struggle against illegal immigration ... Legal residence will be granted case-by-case on objective criteria”.

The Socialist Party candidate did not offer any criticism of minister of the interior Guéant’s proud achievement of expelling 32,912 undocumented immigrants in 2011, up from 28,026 in 2010, a 17.5 percent increase.

In response to a remark by Sarkozy suggesting that Hollande favoured mass legalisation of undocumented immigrants, the Socialist Party’s Mireille Le Corre, in charge of “immigration-integration” policy, insisted: “François Hollande ... is not for carrying out mass legalisations, but for re-establishing a fair and

transparent procedure. Foreigners whose circumstances do not comply with a possible legalisation will go through an expulsion procedure, under conditions which respect their rights and their dignity”.

Hollande’s anti-immigrant positions are reinforced by the fact that the entire bourgeois and petty-bourgeois “left”—the Socialist Party, Communist Party, Left Party and New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA)—worked actively with Sarkozy in Islamophobic campaigns to ban the burqa and, before that, the Muslim veil in schools. They are now all mobilising behind Hollande in the presidential elections in April-May to enable the French bourgeoisie to ride out the economic crisis by destroying the rights and living standards of the working class as is now under way in Greece.



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