

France's Socialist Party government plans to force Roma into ghettos

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France's Socialist Party (PS) government has threatened to forcibly dismantle Roma encampments in France, raising the spectre of mass expulsions of Roma. It also announced plans to force the Roma into "integration villages."

PS Interior Minister Manuel Valls is leading the campaign to close down Roma camps. On July 31 he told Europe1: "Prefects have a mission to dismantle Roma camps when there is a court ruling. Things are simple. Yes, when there is a court ruling the camps will be dismantled."

While preparing measures to expel Roma, there are also plans to place them in the so-called "integration villages." There, the Roma would be forced to remain in ultra-cheap prefabricated housing and monitored by state employees and security forces.

According to *Le Monde*, there are five villages and three more are under construction in Lille, the hometown of PS First Secretary and Lille mayor Martine Aubry. Under the guise of providing social support for Roma, the purpose of such "villages d'insertion" is to ghettoize the Roma population.

Valls's campaign against the Roma is a clear expression of the reactionary character of PS government, which is continuing the persecution of Roma and other immigrants from the previous government of conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy.

In his speech in Grenoble on July 30, 2010, President Nicolas Sarkozy called for dismantling Roma camps across France, penalizing families and stripping French citizenship from migrants. After his speech, Sarkozy's government deported over 10,000 Roma to Romania and Bulgaria. An estimated 15,000 Roma live in improvised housing encampments on the edges of major cities throughout France.

The PS' plans to attack the Roma expose the utter cynicism of the mild criticisms it made of Sarkozy's anti-

Roma policies during the 2012 presidential election campaign.

In March, while running as the PS presidential candidate, President François Hollande told pro-immigrant organizations: "When unhealthy camps are dismantled, alternative solutions must be proposed. We cannot continue to accept that families can be forced out of locations without solutions."

Now that it has taken power, however, the Hollande administration is moving rapidly to abandon its criticisms of Sarkozy and embrace ethnic targeting of the Roma.

It is insisting that even the limited criticisms the press made of Sarkozy's policies are no longer acceptable. Valls stated that he now wants to "deal with this subject with serenity. This is not easy. If the debate is carried out in public the way it was two years ago, it will be impossible."

Valls's comments have received full support from the entire political establishment. Eric Ciotti, a deputy of the conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) opposition party, said of Valls: "If he carries them out [the dismantlings of Roma camps], I will support him."

A spokesman for Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault praised Valls' position: "This is a line that combines firmness and dignity while respecting Republican values."

In the wake of Sarkozy's Grenoble speech, some politicians and media commentators criticized him, describing his racial targeting of the Roma as anti-democratic. Sarkozy's measures were widely compared with the persecution of ethnic minorities—including the Roma—under the Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime during World War II. (See also: "Back to Vichy").

Now, as the PS proposes a similar anti-Roma policy, they meet no opposition from within the political establishment. Petty-bourgeois "left" parties, like the

New-Anti Capitalist party (NPA), which endorsed Hollande's election, remain totally silent on Valls's persecution of Roma.

In recent years, the French ruling class has systematically whipped up anti-immigrant prejudices, trampling basic democratic rights to divide the working class while pushing through cuts and waging deeply unpopular wars abroad.

In 2004 former conservative President Jacques Chirac imposed a ban on headscarves in public schools, in order to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment. His successor, Sarkozy, continued with these anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant policies, notably by enforcing an anti-constitutional ban on publicly wearing the burqa, in order to appeal to voters of the neo-fascist National Front (FN) while making deep social cuts.

Hollande, who has already made clear that he will not repeal Sarkozy's reactionary measures, is committed to using the same reactionary methods to stoke a racist atmosphere in France.

After less than three months in power, the PS's popularity is plummeting. In the name of promoting French competitiveness, the Hollande administration is proposing deep attacks against the working class—including massive cuts in social spending, a series of mass layoffs in numerous industries, and wage cuts and other labour market reforms.

The Hollande government is backing the automaker PSA Peugeot Citroën's announcement of shutting the Aulnay plant, near Paris, with the elimination of 8,000 jobs across France.

As unemployment and social inequality deepen, the PS anticipates bitter struggles from the working class. The persecution of Roma is part of a broader campaign to divert popular opposition to PS's support for imperialist wars and austerity measures and block opposition in the working class by appealing to anti-immigrant hatreds.



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