

French ex-left parties support state persecution of the Roma

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France's petty-bourgeois parties, including the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), *Lutte Ouvrière* (Workers Struggle, LO) and the Left Party (PG), are maintaining a deafening silence over President François Hollande's decision to destroy Roma encampments.

Since the election of the Socialist Party (PS), these outfits have shifted their public position on the persecution of the Roma, which they had previously criticised, albeit hypocritically, when it was being carried out by the previous, conservative president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

An Atlantico-Ifop opinion poll on August 14 found that the voters of the "left" parties largely support of the dismantling of Roma camps. The figures are 72 percent for PS voters, 61 percent for Left Front (the Communist Party, or PCF, and the PG) supporters and 59 percent for the Greens.

In cities where mayors from these parties oversee Roma populations, they support the campaign to evict the Roma, as *Le Télégramme* notes: "'At present there are four encampments, which adds up to a thousand people,' says Michel Beaumale, the PCF mayor of Stains in the Seine-Saint-Denis department. He adds: 'It raises problems of hygiene, law-and-order, etc,' and that he has written to François Hollande 'to inform him of the problem'."

During the election campaign, these parties were well aware that Hollande intended to attack the Roma. In February 2012, during the official presidential campaign, Hollande proposed a "solution" to the presence of the Roma from the European Union in France: "that camps be set up ... to accommodate them in France." (See also: "France's Socialist Party government launches mass expulsions of Roma")

The NPA and the Left Front nevertheless openly supported François Hollande in the second round of the

elections. LO, for its part, stated that it perfectly respectable for its voters to decide to vote for Hollande.

Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls announced his decision on the destruction of the Roma camps on radio station *Europe 1* on August 8. In a brief statement on August 10 entitled "Valls at work, the witch hunt of the Roma continues", the NPA calls for "the mobilisation of all the social and political forces, in all ways, to put a stop to this indignity, to impose respect for fundamental rights, notably the right to housing."

This appeal is hollow and cynical. The NPA proposes a common mobilisation of political and trade union organisations which support Hollande, and which called for a vote for him, knowing that he would carry out an eviction programme against the Roma.

This call for a mobilisation is nothing but a masquerade by the NPA. Like the other parties of the petty-bourgeois "left", it has not the slightest intention of opposing Hollande's reactionary policies.

This differs from the position taken by the NPA, at least verbally, in 2010, when it criticised Sarkozy's Grenoble speech proposing to dismantle of Roma camps. In its article "The Roma deprived of the right to survive", it wrote: "The anti-racist struggle is indivisible. To yield to the anti-Roma campaign, is to tolerate the racist gangrene which divides and exonerates the possessing classes from their responsibilities for growing poverty."

Such criticisms from the NPA, LO and the Left Front were hardly convincing, to be sure, as they had supported other anti-immigrant measures under Sarkozy. Oliver Besancenot of the NPA, on May 2, 2010, explained his support for the principle of Sarkozy's law imposing a fine for wearing the burqa: "The problem wasn't the fine, but the political use that was made of it." He was expressing a tactical objection

to Sarkozy's promulgation of the law, but he was fundamentally in agreement with the law, despite its neo-fascistic character.

In April 2012, LO and the NPA defended the eviction from the Paris *bourse du travail* (union hall) of *sans-papiers* (undocumented immigrants) fighting to be legalised. (See also: "France: Union thugs, police evict undocumented workers from union hall")

Above all, their criticisms of Sarkozy over the Roma did not prevent them from calling for a PS government which encourages the same "racist gangrene" as Sarkozy's. Fundamentally, the petty-bourgeois parties were not opposed to the anti-Roma witch hunt, but only had objections to the person who was to put these measures in place.

Sarkozy's "bling-bling" personality, his parading of his friendship with France's super-rich, his Hungarian origins, and his open admiration for the USA irritated the French petty bourgeoisie. When he was persecuting the Roma, the press openly compared his policy of ethnic cleansing to that of the Vichy regime, which collaborated with the Nazi Occupation.

On the other hand, the mass media and the PS, with the support of the NPA, LO and the Left Front, presented Hollande as "normal", that is, a more traditional French bourgeois politician who is discreet about his private life. The PS can now continue Sarkozy's racist policies largely undisturbed, confident that it will retain the support of the petty-bourgeois "left".

The issue of the free movement of the Roma and, more widely, of democratic rights in the explosive political and social atmosphere in France is covered up by the NPA and the other petty-bourgeois parties. The PS wants to get support from the most reactionary social forces in order to strengthen law enforcement and to divide the working class as it prepares more austerity measures.

This is an international phenomenon, as one sees especially with the recent attacks by the Greek bourgeoisie against immigrants. It organised a round-up to deport 1,400 people, promoting the neo-fascist Golden Dawn organization, to terrorize the working class and clamp down on its opposition to austerity measures which are devastating the country.

The defence of democratic rights necessitates the

defence of the Roma, an obligation that falls to the working class, which will have to organise itself independently of the petty-bourgeois "left."



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