

French students protest deportation of immigrants

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18 October 2013

Thousands of high school students protested in Paris and several other French cities against the deportation of immigrant high school students by France's Socialist Party (PS) government.

Demonstrators denounced the recent expulsion of Léonarda Dibrani, a 15-year-old Roma student who was taken off a school bus and deported to Kosovo on October 9, and the October 12 deportation of Armenian student Khatchik Kachatryan, 18. There have been ongoing protests at Kachatryan's high school in Paris, and several hundred students protested his deportation in front of the Paris *rectorat* (education authority) on Wednesday.

The protests, called by the PS-affiliated Independent and Democratic Federation of High School Students (FIDL), come amid mounting popular hostility to the racist policies championed by PS Interior Minister Manuel Valls. He has sought to boost the PS' collapsing approval ratings by appealing to the neo-fascist National Front (FN) vote, including by enforcing a reactionary ban on wearing the burqa and calling for the deportation of all Roma from France. (See: French Interior Minister Manuel Valls proposes mass deportation of Roma).

In Paris, thousands of students marched with hand-made signs denouncing Valls and opposing deportations of immigrant school children. Students told reporters they were disappointed in the PS administration of President François Hollande, whose anti-immigrant policies were "if anything worse" than those of the previous government of President Nicolas Sarkozy, leader of the right-wing Gaullist party.

Students briefly clashed with a small cordon of police who fired tear gas at them, and ultimately pushed through the cordon.

Fourteen high schools reported "disturbances," and

four—Maurice Ravel, Hélène Boucher, Charlemagne, and Sophie Germain—were blockaded yesterday morning.

Hundreds of students protested in cities including Grenoble, Avignon and La Rochelle, where students blockaded the Dautet and Turgot high schools.

Dibrani's case has been widely reported by French media and caused national outrage. There are charges that her deportation was illegal because she was initially arrested in a school setting.

Speaking to France Inter radio from Kosovo, Dibrani said her family was isolated in Mitrovica because they were Roma. "I felt awful abandoning my friends, the school, everyone," she recalled. "I felt ashamed, too, because the police were there and my friends were asking what I had done, if I had stolen something."

An online petition demanding Dibrani's return to France has gathered 11,700 signatures.

The PS government and the parties and unions in its political periphery are divided over whether to react to rising opposition among students. The FIDL reportedly called for protests a day before they began, apparently fearing the protests would otherwise grow independently of official "left" forces. A number of trade unions denounced the student protests.

Le Monde featured an interview with Philippe Tournier, head of the school principals' union, who denounced the students. Claiming blockades of high schools are a "real ethical problem," he said: "Blockades of high schools are a detestable habit in our country... They continue to occur as the most popular form of political action, even though they really represent the lowest level of political consciousness."

Various PS and Green Party officials criticized Valls' positions. Green Party Senator Esther Benbassa declared, "Yes, it must be said, it is a round-up," using

a term that describes the World War II Vichy regime's round-up of Jews for deportation to Nazi Germany.

Valls, who has defended the deportation of Dibrani, briefly spoke from Martinique, where he was traveling. He reaffirmed that he is a man "of the left," explaining, "I am of the left because humanity, youth, children are a priority for me."

In fact, the protests reflect a rising realization among students and broader layers of the population that the PS government—with its policies of social austerity, war, and anti-immigrant chauvinism—is not a left-wing government in any sense of the term. Together with its pseudo-left periphery, the PS speaks for the interests of the banks and financial aristocracy. Valls' promotion of policies acceptable to the FN is simply the clearest indication of the right-wing character of the PS and its political allies.

The only way forward for students opposed to the anti-immigrant policies of the PS and the rising influence of the FN in French politics is a struggle to mobilize the working class in a politically independent movement against the PS and the entire political establishment on a socialist perspective.

The principal obstacles to such a struggle are the pseudo-left forces that are intervening to channel opposition among students behind a perspective of pressuring the PS and shifting the make-up of the Hollande government by forcing Valls to resign. Valls' resignation by itself would not alter the essential character of the Hollande government. His factional opponents in the Green Party and PS, and in the Left Front, speak just as much for finance capital as Valls himself.

Left Front officials including Pierre Laurent, the chairman of the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), and Left Party (PG) National Secretary Eric Coquerel attended the student protests. Laurent said, "The conditions of [Dibrani's] expulsion add to the indignity of this action, which discredits the policies of Manuel Valls... [We must] take initiatives throughout the country to petition and demonstrate together with non-governmental organizations to obtain such action as quickly as possible."

Left Front leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former PS minister, tweeted: "Do not wait for the next round-up to throw out the person who is responsible! Valls, resign!"

This is simply an attempt to hide the responsibility of

reactionary forces such as the Left Front that support the PS and are themselves part of the rightward drift of the entire French political establishment towards the positions of the FN. Valls' attacks on the Roma have been supported for over a year by the entire Hollande administration, which is divided now over how aggressively to pursue its anti-immigrant policies only due to rising popular opposition.

The pseudo-left forces are deeply implicated in the PS' turn to the policies of the FN. The Left Front, like the pseudo-left New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), called for an unconditional vote for Hollande in the second round of the presidential elections. It directly took part in the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant campaigns through which the racist politics of the FN were integrated into the mainstream of French bourgeois politics.

The PCF worked directly with Sarkozy in 2009 to launch the burqa ban, which was ultimately supported by the entire pseudo-left, including the NPA.



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