

Mass student protests in France against deportation of Roma schoolgirl

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The mobilisation of thousands of high school pupils throughout France against the deportation of the 15-year-old Roma schoolgirl Leonarda Dibrani and her family to Kosovo has destabilised the government of Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande.

The brutality of the seizure of Leonarda—she was taken from a coach while on a school outing, against the protests of her teacher and in front of her schoolmates—has triggered broad popular disgust. While pursuing reactionary austerity policies, Hollande and his Interior Minister Manuel Valls have resorted even more openly to the racist policies of the National Front, scapegoating immigrants for the social crisis. Social anger over this policy has now exploded.

The wave of outrage forced Hollande to address the public on television on Saturday. But rather than assuaging the anger of the students, he made things even worse. He defended the action of the authorities against Leonarda, not wanting to snub Valls. Then he made a “generous gesture” to the Roma girl, inviting her to come back to France—but only if she left her family behind.

“If she asks for it, she will be given a welcome, but only her”, Hollande said. Replying from Mitrovica in Kosovo, Leonarda rejected the cynical offer. “I won’t go to France on my own, I won’t leave my family, I’m not the only one who should go to school; there are my brothers and sisters too”, she affirmed.

Her father, who has been the target of a campaign of denigration across the media and the political spectrum, including a disgraceful attack from Alain Krivine of the pseudo-left NPA on *France Info* radio on Sunday, standing beside his daughter, asked Hollande if he would agree to impose such a separation on a young daughter of his.

The media generally described Hollande’s address

and the reaction to it as a disaster. The site of the *Nouvel Observateur* asked, if the government will be able to maintain itself. Calling the Leonarda affair as an “explosive cocktail”, it wrote: “Fundamental disagreements about the immigration policies of the minister of the interior, a panic-stricken fear of seeing the youth flare up, and an astonishing amateurishness in communication. The balance sheet for a François Hollande already at rock bottom in the opinion polls: the president’s credibility contested, ridiculed live on all the media by a teenager. Disastrous damage done to the image of the president, his authority once again put in doubt.”

The *Sud-Ouest* newspaper wrote: “Wanting to please everybody, François Hollande satisfied no one... [this] has demonstrated, in a nearly frightening hysterical atmosphere, the state of disarray in which the government finds itself”.

The two-week school holiday starting on Saturday will temporally halt the mobilisation of the students that developed last week, but they have promised that it will continue after the break.

WSWS supporters at the Friday demonstration of some 10,000 students in Paris spoke to the demonstrators, who expressed deep anger at the injustice done to Leonarda and other deported students.

Most were skeptical about all political organisations and refused or discarded stickers of the Left Front of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, which is trying to derail the protests into a pressure campaign on the PS. Some wore equal signs daubed on their faces to express an appeal for equality of treatment.

Théo told the WSWS: “It’s not right to deport people like that, they’re like us and have the right to an education like us. Leonarda had been at school for four years and now suddenly she’s sent back to her country.

Manuel Valls is on the left but is against education, I don't understand why, it's pointless. All Sans Papiers (immigrants without papers) attending school should be legalised. It's their right to have an education. Left parties are supposed to be revolutionary, but they're not. The Socialist Party and the right are the same. Here we're trying to make people aware so that this sort of deportation is not repeated. It's inhuman.

"To win we're going to have to fight, we want to put pressure on the government so that it provides proper solutions. We're not part of any political group. It's a solidarity movement."

Alison, another high school student, said: "Education is indispensable today, and denying them this right makes me angry. They're repressed in their country and here they're free... We're sending a message of solidarity to the victims of deportation. I wish President Hollande were closer to the people and put Manuel Valls, who took this decision, into line.

Jean-Claude, a student with the Stalinist Communist Party youth, said: "The parties of the left (the Socialist Party, the Left Front, the Communist Party) got together first to block the right, notably against the reelection of [former president Nicolas] Sarkozy. We thought that with Hollande the policies would be less harsh and it would be easier to have a dialogue. But we were wrong. We didn't think things would get so bad."



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