

Appeal by family of Roma schoolgirl to return to France rejected

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On January 28, a French administrative tribunal rejected the request for a resident's permit by the family of Leonarda Dibrani, the 15-year-old Roma schoolgirl who was picked up by the police while on a school outing near Besançon on October 9 and deported to Kosovo.

The Socialist Party (PS) government's action and the racist, anti-Roma statements of its Interior Minister Manuel Valls, led to mass street protests by high school students throughout France in October and November. They called for Leonarda's return to France and that of another student, 19-year-old Armenian Khatchik Khachatryan.

President Hollande appeared on television with a cynical and incoherent proposal offering Leonarda the right to return to France, but without her parents and siblings. Unsurprisingly, she refused Hollande's offer: "I will not abandon my family. I'm not the only one who needs to go to school; there are also my brothers and sisters."

Indeed, the Dibrani family had been settled in France for four years, with six of the children born in Italy and one in France. The tribunal's judgement was based on the view that Mr. Dibrani had "no real desire to integrate French society."

Although Leonarda's pleas have fallen on deaf ears, the family will make an appeal. She has demanded her right to be considered French: "My homeland is France, here [Kosovo] we will die of hunger, we have been sent here to die. The lawyer told us not to despair because we have the right of appeal, but I don't believe anymore in justice."

This ruling against Leonarda's family reflects virulent and escalating anti-Roma racism in France, which has been given official sanction by the Socialist Party (PS) government. Last year, Valls indicated that

he wanted the Roma as a people to leave France, saying they "are destined to stay in or return to Romania."

He added, "the majority must be expelled beyond our borders ... the occupants of the [Roma] camps do not want to integrate into our country for cultural reasons or because they are in the hands of networks dealing in begging or prostitution."

The PS government has made it a priority to hunt down and deport undocumented immigrants, trampling on their democratic rights—including their right to freedom of circulation within the European Union. It has beaten the record for expulsions, going beyond the previous right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy's figures. In 2012, 36,822 undocumented immigrants were deported, an increase of 11 percent over 2011.

This policy has in particular targeted the Roma. While the Roma population in France is currently only 20,000, the government expelled 10,000 over a six month period in 2013.

The denial of the children's rights to stay in France, where their education had begun, was based on allegations against her father. Documents denounced Mr Dibrani for his "bad maintenance of his accommodation, parking his broken down car in front of the apartment, insulting the housing manager, the children's repeated absences from school and no serious search for work."

The fact that such allegations were seized upon to justify Leonarda's expulsion itself reflects the reactionary political climate that now prevails in France.

The decision by the tribunal, on the government's recommendation, to reject Leonarda's family's request for a resident permit or asylum, has been met with total silence by the pseudo-left groups. From the NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party), through the Student Solidarity

union (Solidaires Etudiants) to the SOS Racisme group—an offshoot of the PS and the NPA’s predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League—there has been not a word of protest.

The leader of SOS Racisme in the Paris region, Blaise Cuecco, has defended the PS government’s policies, suggesting it is somehow neutral and not implementing its “real” programme. He lamented, “We are confronted with a government isolated from civil society.”

Cuecco asserts the PS government is avoiding the question of “liquidating the Sarkozy project”. But as the majority of workers now attest, President Hollande not only had no intention of doing so, but is already proceeding further than his right-wing predecessor had.

Last November Cuecco made empty promises that his organization would fight to continue mobilising students to defend Leonarda after the holiday break. However, like the leaders of the other pseudo-left and “human rights” organizations, he retreated to spare the government any embarrassment in the run-up to the municipal elections in March, where the fascist National Front (FN) is expected to make gains.

The government’s popularity is presently at such an historic low due to its austerity policies that it views the far-right rhetoric of Valls as a trump card to appeal to neo-fascist sentiment and undermine the vote for the neo-fascist National Front (FN).



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