

Roma boy attacked by lynch mob in northern Paris

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A 16-year-old Roma teenager, Darius, was abducted and savagely beaten by a lynch mob last Friday at the Cité des Poètes estate in a poor northern suburb of Paris, Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. As of this writing, he is still in a coma, fighting for his life in a Paris hospital after suffering multiple skull fractures.

The assault on Darius is an indictment of French society, and, in particular, of the persecution of the Roma by the Socialist Party (PS) government, whose officials are ordering police to break up Roma encampments and have called for all Roma to leave France. The government and the police covered up the lynching for four days, finally breaking the news on Tuesday.

Julie Launois-Flacelière, the lawyer retained by Darius' family, said, "Darius was taken away as they watched by several individuals, some of whom were masked and armed." The teen was reportedly pushed into a Renault Clio around 5:30 p.m. on Friday by a group of armed men. According to police, Darius was then locked in a basement, where he was beaten to within an inch of his life.

A few hours after Darius was kidnapped, his mother received a call from his mobile, demanding a €15,000 ransom for his return. She alerted the police. Darius was found unconscious in an abandoned supermarket trolley on the side of the N1 motorway.

The attack on Darius was reportedly an act of vengeance, as local residents accused him of stealing jewelry in a nearby flat earlier on Friday. Prosecutor Sylvie Moisson said the attack on Darius occurred after an apartment had been broken into and items stolen. He had reportedly been questioned by police in connection with robberies in the estate, but he had not been convicted of any crime.

Darius, together with his family and other Roma

people, came to live in a makeshift camp close to the Cité des Poètes housing estate in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine that housed about 200 Roma people. Their camp was set up near an abandoned house a few weeks ago, after they were expelled from Aubervilliers at the end of May. After the attack on the boy, the Roma in the camp fled the area in fear the same evening.

The main responsibility for the barbaric assault on Darius lies with the political establishment and the corporate media. Over the last five years, the French political elite has adopted racial and discriminatory measures targeting the Roma population and stigmatizing the entire ethnic group.

The escalating social tensions underlying the assault were provoked by the PS' public vilification of the Roma, recent moves by police to smash Roma camps throughout France, and the poverty and desperation in France's suburbs provoked by decades of social austerity and budget cuts.

The unemployment rate in poorer French suburbs stands at 24 percent, compared to 10.1 percent at the national level. Youth between 15 and 24 are most affected by unemployment, which for them reaches 45 percent.

A 27-year-old electrician and resident of the area, Toufik, told *Le Monde*, "We are condemned to do everything ourselves. That is the problem. All the youth have had problems with police, we will not call them... Here, there is not a movie theater, a mall, a swimming pool, a park for children, nothing."

During the 2012 presidential campaign, then-candidate François Hollande pledged to find a "solution" of the Roma question involving breaking up their camps and detaining them in special facilities—making clear he would continue the incumbent conservative Nicolas Sarkozy's anti-Roma

policy.

After Hollande's election, his government moved to aggressively target the Roma. It has forcibly dismantled Roma encampments in France, deporting tens of thousands. Last year, then-Interior Minister and current Prime Minister Manuel Valls claimed that Roma should be deported and France was "not here to welcome these populations". He has given local authority the mission "to dismantle Roma camps when there is a court ruling."

On Wednesday, local authorities ordered the dismantling of a Roma camp in Marseille, which housed 400 people, including hundreds of children. The PS government reportedly evicted a record 19,380 Roma people from makeshift camps in 2013. Last October, the government deported a 15-year-old Roma schoolgirl Leonarda Dibrani along with her family to Kosovo, sparking student protests in several cities.

After finally breaking their silence on the lynching of Darius, the PS and the media made tried to downplay their constant political targeting of the Roma and to distance themselves from the vigilante beating of Darius. Hollande called the assault an "unspeakable and unjustifiable attack on all the principles on which our republic was founded," while Valls called it an "unacceptable act".

In a June 18 editorial, *Le Monde* cynically postured as appalled by the crime and by indifference to the suffering of the Roma in France. It wrote, "Must one recall that the Republic would be unworthy of itself if it permitted such shameful indifference to predominate? This would mean admitting its impotence faced with such sinister vendettas as those of the cité des Poètes. That would be the worst."

What contemptible hypocrisy! For years, the newspaper has—like the rest of the media and the political establishment—supported the PS and Hollande's persecution of the Roma people. Having been callously indifferent to the consequences of these policies, they are raising this as an issue now only because the horrific consequences of their ethnic persecution of the Roma have now shocked people throughout France.

When in 2010 Hollande's predecessor, Sarkozy, called for dismantling Roma camps across the country and stripping migrants of their citizenship, politicians and media criticized these methods as anti-democratic.

Sarkozy's measures were widely compared with the persecution of ethnic minorities, including both the Jews and the Roma, under France's Nazi-collaborationist Vichy regime during World War II.

Now that it is the PS is carrying out ethnic persecution of Roma, however, it meets with no opposition from within the political establishment or the media. Pseudo-left organizations like the New-Anti Capitalist party (NPA), which endorsed Hollande's election and made a few tepid criticisms of Sarkozy's anti-Roma policies, remain totally silent on PS's persecution of Roma. All of these forces are politically implicated in the assault on Darius.



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