

Stalinist mayor orders the dismantling of Roma camp near Paris

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At the request of Gilles Poux, the French Communist Party (PCF) mayor of La Courneuve in the northern outskirts of Paris, CRS riot police attacked and dismantled a Roma camp housing about 300 people last week.

The Samaritan camp, located between the A86 motorway and the suburban train railway in an industrial area of La Courneuve, is one of France's biggest and oldest makeshift shelters. It was set up in 2007. The PCF municipality of La Courneuve requested the expulsion of the camp in 2013, to prepare for the international climate conference to be held at Le Bourget Exhibition Centre from November 30 to December 11.

Following the August 15 court evacuation order, two riot police units forcefully expelled the Roma people and destroyed the makeshift shelters on August 27, without any prior warning. Under pouring rain, the Roma people were told to leave the camps within one hour. They were forced to leave their belongings, including key documents such as work contracts and children's school certificates.

A 33-year-old man living at the camp told France-Television: "I was at work and I got a phone call from my wife. She told me that the police were there and that she had to leave immediately. In her bag, she only managed to take things for our daughter, who is 20 months old, and our papers."

An employee of Doctors of the World, a humanitarian non-profit organization, said, "They did not have the time to gather their affairs and leave. It's terrible, this is in these situations that they lose the few identity cards that they have."

After the evacuation, only 12 families identified as vulnerable—including pregnant women, infants and disabled—were housed in emergency shelters temporarily, for few days. This amounted to approximately 60 people in all. The others have become homeless, though some were taken in as guests of non-profit organization staff. Many children risk missing school as classes start up

again.

While he shed crocodile tears over "the distress of Roma families" in a public statement issued by his office, Poux defended the expulsion order in the pages of *Le Parisien*. "A town like ours, where 53 percent of housing consists of projects, cannot afford slums," he wrote. "This is why I launched this expulsion operation, as I have repeatedly done. In the last two years we called upon the security forces 20 times to clear out slums."

Poux added that he was unhappy because "the inhabitants of the Samaritan [slum] have been camping out since Friday in the gardens of city hall! We need a global political response at the national or even international level."

This is empty posturing in defense of the racist policies of the French ruling class. Hundreds of thousands of people cannot find decent, affordable housing in Paris, as in other major cities across Europe. It is the bourgeoisie, drowning in its own money, that insists that this problem cannot be solved and seeks to divert social anger by turning the Roma into targets of media denunciation, police repression and ethnic cleansing.

The PCF itself has a long history of adaptation to French nationalism, rooted in the Stalinist rejection of the program of world socialist revolution. The PCF entered into alliances with various bourgeois politicians, from Léon Blum in the Popular Front of the late 1930s to Charles de Gaulle in the immediate postwar period. These alliances, designed to prevent socialist revolution, were based on accepting France's brutal rule in its colonies.

The racist implications of its policies became ever more overt, however, after the PCF blocked a revolution during the 1968 general strike, and France's industrial decline began in the 1970s. In this period, the PCF formed a political alliance with the Socialist Party (PS) and prepared to support the Stalinist bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism inside the USSR.

During the 1981 presidential election, Georges Marchais, the head of the PCF, conducted an anti-immigrant campaign, aiming to divide the working class along national lines. The PCF voted in favour of limiting immigration at the time. In 1980, Marchais had backed the PCF mayor of Vitry-sur-Seine in the southeastern suburbs of Paris who had bulldozed a house for Malian migrant workers.

Another Stalinist mayor, Robert Hue, organized a hostile demonstration outside of the house of a Moroccan family in Montigny-les-Cormeilles in 1981 and then went on to become PCF national secretary.

In Poux's persecution of the Roma, this reactionary heritage comes together with the intensifying crisis of the PS under President François Hollande. As it imposes deep social cuts at home and wages unpopular wars abroad, the PS is systematically whipping up anti-immigrant prejudices and trampling fundamental democratic rights.

Since the PS government of President François Hollande came to power in 2012, the PS has intensified attacks on the Roma, dismantling their camps and expelling them from France.

The PS expelled about 20,000 Roma in 2013, twice as many as in 2012, according to a 2014 report by the League of Human Rights and the European Roma Rights Center. In 2013, according to the study, "authorities dismantled 165 of the 400 known camps in France, expelling 19,380 people, as opposed to 9,404 in 2012 and 8,455 in 2011."

The PS has defended the dismantling of Roma camps and the expulsion of the Roma, with Prime Minister Manuel Valls declaring that France should be ethnically cleansed of the Roma. In 2013, he said, "The Roma should go back to Romania or Bulgaria and stay there."



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