

Stop fascist pogroms in the Czech Republic!

Tue, 25/11/2008 - 09:33

A report from the SOP, Czech section of the League for the Fifth International, on fascist attacks on Roma

On 17th November the nineteenth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution- we witnessed something in the Czech Republic that many of us had only experienced in history books - an attempted pogrom. The Workers Party (Dělnická strana), a far right racist party whose chose its name for purposes of deception name, held a demonstration "against positive discrimination" in the Janov neighbourhood of the northern Bohemian town of Litvinov. In fact this was an attempt to terrorise and drive out its Roma inhabitants. Six hundred Nazis and their supporters clashed with a thousand police, hurling cobblestones and Molotov cocktails resulting in a police car in flames, 15 serious injuries, and 12 arrests. Janov is a ghetto predominantly populated by Roma people. Northern Bohemia is a region with the highest unemployment rates in the Czech Republic. The most alarming fact is that many local people were sympathetic to the Nazi march with 200 actually joining it. Experts warn that similar 'incidents' will increase in number and Nazis could win even more support through this policy

The Workers Party, led by Tom Vandas and former members of far right Republican Party, after several years of political zigzagging between various far right ideologies. Joined their forces with the hard-line Nazis of National Resistance and the Autonomous Nationalists. Its policy today is to target Roma, the most vulnerable group in the Czech Republic. But as we know it will eventually turn against the very workers whose name its has demagogically stolen for its party label, and to whom it would reduce to the condition of obedient slaves. The Workers Party has started to abuse the problem of growing ghettos. There are more than three hundred ghettos with some 80,000 Roma inhabitants in the Czech Republic. Restitutions of flats and houses to families of pre-communist owners, privatization of social housing, deregulation and speculation have all led to the growth of ghettos. Due to widespread racial discrimination a large majority of Roma face serious problems in finding a job. The authorities claim this is due to insufficient education and lack of labour discipline. But it is in fact the result of the persistent segregation of Roma both in education and long-term unemployment. A vicious circle makes some Roma resigned to dependence on social benefits, have problems paying the rent, and the spiral ends in moving to one of the ghettos, euphemistically called 'socially excluded Roma localities.' The way out of a ghetto is nowhere near as easy as the way into one. Experience across the world shows that clearly. A ghetto's inhabitants can see no future. Prostitution and crime often become the only way to make a living, resulting in antisocial behaviour, which increases their isolation. But racism did not come about due to the ghettos: the rise of ghettos is a result of racism. The vast majority of ghettos emerged over the last 10 to 12 years. They are a product of unfettered capitalist "development," part of the inequality and poverty we see growing worldwide.

Despite the governments' promises to take care of the situation, ghettos are not disappearing but growing. It tells us a lot, not about ghetto inhabitants, but about the society at large. The Workers Party tries to exploit the fear of people living near ghettos. Combined with its openly Nazi allies of National Resistance and the Autonomous Nationalists it launched its campaign of pogroms that meant to be a recruitment drive for the far right. Their solution to the ghetto problem is to increase the spread and intensity of racism the

very same racism that results in social exclusion of Roma and emergence of ghettos. The Workers Party wants us to believe that a flamethrower is the best tool for extinguishing a fire. But they have forgotten to tell two hundred 'decent citizens' who marched by their side that it won't be only Roma from ghettos or other Roma who may be burned by 'Nazi' flame thrower but all the freedoms and rights of us all, including the very 'decent Litvinov citizens'. There are a lot of reasons why to stand up here and now against brown plague with which the Workers Party tries to infect the whole country. It is an attempt to incite murder of people for their colour of skin while it would make ghetto problem much worse in the end. Moreover, the wave of Nazi violence and racism would not stop at the gates of ghettos and we all might easily become the victims of fascism. The time to act has come.

A group of students at The Faculty of Philosophy who understand this danger and oppose racism formed a new initiative called Students Against Racism in October. They set about to build a broad anti-racist movement. And SOP has been working within this initiative since its foundation. Are we supposed to be put off by the attempts of the interior minister Langer to ban the Workers Party? No, we mustn't! State bans and repression cannot stop Nazis for us. Bans on far right parties in Germany made hardly difference. They can easily set up a new party or act without having an official organisation. And state repression often turns against those who fight fascism. Official attempts to ban a Nazi march in Pilsen resulted in a ban on anti-Nazi counter-demo while Nazis were marching along the Pilsen streets. Nazis must be stopped in the streets and elsewhere. We cannot rely on the state that lets ghettos and racism flourish to do it for us. We must stop brown plague before it reaches epidemic proportions. A strong and active anti-racist movement must be build. And we, revolutionaries, propose to launch widespread education campaign to wipe out racial prejudice. Confront Nazis and radical racists whenever they show up in the streets. Support the self-defence of those attacked by them in ghettos and elsewhere. Build the initiative among university students and initiate similar initiatives among school students and in the trade unions for it is among workers where anti-racism must gain strong roots if we are to succeed. Ghettos can only disappear if racism and poverty are eradicated.

Roma must be integrated into the workers movement not assimilated by expunging their culture or insisting they become Czech patriots. We must make trade unions our major ally in the anti-racist struggle since only workers' organisations can unite Roma and 'white' workers, fight racist practices of employers and social exclusion and poverty of (not only) Roma. Fascists know that their rise to power in 1930s was helped by a severe economic crisis such as the one that is spreading across the world today. That is the reason why they have decided to step up their activity. We too should recognise the link between them and, in a militant fight back against the crisis, make sure that the Nazis are crushed whilst still in their embryonic stage.

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/stop-fascist-pogroms-czech-republic>