

Fascists mount pogrom against Roma population in Italy

By Marianne Arens
6 April 2019

Pogrom-style racist clashes occurred in Torre Maura, a suburb of the Italian capital of Rome on Tuesday. Several Sinti and Roma families were driven out of the impoverished district. The fascists from CasaPound, who led the action, feel able to act with such aggression because they have backing from the government and state apparatus.

On the afternoon of April 2, several Sinti and Roma families were transferred into city accommodations in Torre Maura. The fascists agitated against this, managing to mobilise some of the most backward local residents. Along with CasaPound with its leader Mauro Antonini, other right-wing extremist groups like Forza Nuova took part. For several hours, they ran riot on the streets.

The Nazis rallied until late into the evening, supported by a handful of backward residents, in front of the accommodation where 65 Sinti and Roma, including children, were being housed. They shouted “*Fuori fuori!*” (out!) and insulted and intimidated anyone who appeared at the entrance or in the yard of the accommodation.

Rubbish bins were overturned and set alight, while a car belonging to the cooperative that works in the accommodation was set ablaze. Racist slogans were sprayed on the wall in front of the house, including that “f***ing apes” should be “burned alive.” When a volunteer sought to enter the house with a box of sandwiches, the mob tore the box from him, threw it to the ground, and trampled the sandwiches.

The siege lasted late into the evening. In the darkness, the assailants set off an explosive device in the yard, but luckily nobody was injured. The fascists repeatedly sought to incite the situation further, but the group barely grew in size. Instead, residents turned away in disgust. “These people here are organising the

war among the poor,” commented an elderly woman.

After a crisis meeting, the Rome city authorities decided to relocate the Roma families. As the last buses bearing the city’s logo departed from the house, the fascists broke out in jubilation, kicking the vehicles, in which children were seated. Several videos show a mob subsequently extending their arms in a fascist salute and bellowing the national anthem.

The district mayor of the suburb, Roberto Romanella (Five Star Movement), encouraged the fascists by stating at a press conference that a serious mistake had been made “which cannot be repeated.” Rome’s mayor, Virginia Raggi (Five Star Movement), hypocritically condemned the “racist hatred being whipped up by right-wing extremists.” In reality, her party bears responsibility for the rise of the fascists.

With the Lega, the Five Star Movement forms Italy’s coalition government, whose policies are determined by Interior Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini of the Lega. Hardly a day passes without Salvini agitating against refugees and Roma. At his initiative, the Italian government has closed the country’s ports to refugee rescue ships, condemning thousands of people to drown in the Mediterranean. The Salvini decree has also condemned tens of thousands of refugees within Italy to illegality. Refugee aid workers and sea rescuers are being sentenced to years in prison.

As a coalition partner, the Five Star Movement also bears responsibility for these policies. The Five Star Movement emerged from last year’s parliamentary elections as the largest party, with 33 percent of the vote. It concluded a coalition agreement with the far-right Lega, which had secured half as many votes (17.4 percent). The Five Star Movement thus helped the Lega obtain power and ensures it has a

parliamentary majority for its reactionary policies.

These policies play into the hands of the fascists, who feel emboldened. By contrast, they enjoy little support among the population. At the beginning of March, hundreds of thousands protested in Milan against racism.

The fascists know full well that their crimes are tolerated by the highest levels of the state and government. The government systematically incites right-wing extremist sentiments, and sets precedents that only encourage the fascists. For example, Salvini ordered the house arrest of Riace mayor Dominico Lucano, who had sought to prevent his small town from dying out by resettling immigrants there. All foreign residents in Riace were deported.

It is also noteworthy that the president of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, recently spoke positively of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. The member of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia told a radio interview that the fascist "Duce" accomplished "positive things." In addition to his negative acts, which included his conduct of the war and introduction of anti-Semitic laws, Mussolini managed to build "infrastructure, bridges, roads, and sport parks for our country," claimed Tajani. "One can't claim that he did nothing," he added.

The subsequent outrage expressed by other European Parliament deputies cannot conceal the fact that the European Union (EU) and the governments of its member states, led by Germany, are responsible for the reemergence of pogroms in Europe. The EU's refugee policy is no less brutal than that of the coalition in Rome.

Only last week, the EU brought to an end its Operation Sofia (Eunavfor Med) in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the EU cooperates closely with the Libyan coast guard, which has established conditions akin to hell on earth for refugees. An indication of the EU's despicable policies was given by the order from the Maltese government a few days ago for the army to storm a rescue ship.

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