



## FRENCH INVOKE CURFEWS TO QUELL YOUTH RIOTING

November 9, 2005

*Cities all around France have set curfews in an effort to quell violent rioting by youths that has plagued the European country for almost two weeks.*

The rioting, which has grown into a nationwide insurrection by disillusioned suburban youths who complain of discrimination and unemployment, was sparked by the accidental death of two teens Oct. 27.

The two youth were electrocuted at an electricity sub-station in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, after locals claimed they were chased by police.

The violence has impacted nearly every major city in the country and is the worst civil unrest in the nation for nearly 40 years.

Thousands of cars and buses have been burned, one elderly man was killed by rioters and more than 100 police and fire personnel have been injured, some seriously.

“It spread, like a sort of shock wave across the country,” National Police Chief Michel Gaudin told the New York Times.

### **Racial and class tensions**

Although most of the rioters are the children of Arab and African immigrants born in France, many feel like permanent outsiders.

“I am French. I have the paper French. But when you go to the post, the police station, you are not French,” a young man told Independent Television News.

Most are Muslim, but the police say the violence is not being supported by Islamic groups, and Muslim leaders issued a fatwa forbidding Muslims from joining the riots.

Alexis Debat, a former French defense ministry official, said the violence is sustained by prejudice that makes the young people feel uncertain about their future.

“Today a French Muslim has one-eighth to one-tenth the chance of a non-Muslim French national with a non-Muslim name to get a job,” said Debat. “I mean there is a pervasive,

very dark racism in French society that associates the second generation Muslims, these second generation immigrants with trouble.”

The rioters were further incensed by comments made by Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, who called the rioters “racaille,” the French word for scum.

“Sarkozy did a really terrible job. He really messed it up. He treats us like we are dirt on the car tires. I am not a tire,” a young rioter told ITN.

### **A social crisis**

Some in France believe the rioters are criminals acting out, but others say the situation reflects a major political crisis for a nation that has prided itself on its egalitarian social system.

“France is in a social and economic crisis,” Michelle Rosso, a 43-year-old music teacher from suburban Paris, told the Washington Post. “It’s similar to the U.S. civil rights movement in the ‘60s. The integration policies of this country clearly do not work.”

Official response to the riots has been slow. President Jacques Chirac did not speak publicly about the violence until Tuesday, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of violence. The president, who suffered a stroke in September, is considered a lame-duck president with two people, Interior Minister Sarkozy and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, battling to replace him in 2007.

*--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra*

© 2005 MacNeil/Lehrer Productions