

Massive police deployment in Villiers-le-Bel

France: Three nights of rioting in response to youths' deaths

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The town of Villiers-le-Bel on the northern outskirts of Paris resembled a civil war zone on Tuesday night. An occupation force of a thousand police, assisted by a helicopter with searchlights, attempted to quell the rebellion of youth enraged by the death, in a collision with a police car, of two teenagers, Larami, 16, and Moushin, 15.

The rebellion was partially stifled by the massive police presence, but several dozen cars were torched and waste bins set alight in the town and nearby localities. At midnight 22 arrests had been made. Some youth have already been summarily sentenced to months in jail.

An attempt to whitewash the police for the deaths of Larami and Moushin began in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Police officials and Marie-Thérèse Givry, the Pontoise district prosecutor, asserted that the cop car was travelling slowly through the housing estate, home to the deceased, and that the boys' mini-motorcycle crashed into the vehicle.

This story has begun to unravel. An amateur video, obtained by *Le Monde*, reveals that the damage done to the car suggests that it was travelling at high speed.

The newspaper commented Wednesday: "According to the IGPN [National Police General Inspectorate], in charge of investigating the circumstances of the collision, the photos that have appeared in the press showing the vehicle with the front caved in and the windscreen cracked up were not caused by the violence of the crash, but could be explained by destruction caused by blows from iron bars after the accident.

"This element is one of the arguments put forward by the police to support the version of a car going slowly and hit by the mini-bike on the left front of the car.

"The video pictures filmed a few minutes after the accident ... seriously undermine this hypothesis."

This confirms accounts given by witnesses in the neighbourhood, which were dismissed by the government and the media.

France 2 TV's main news bulletin, at 8 pm Wednesday, ignored this evidence and chose to emphasise the apparent corroboration the video lends to the police story that the officers in the vehicle remained with the victims of the crash until the emergency services arrived.

The police initially also claimed that the motorbike the youth

were riding was stolen, but had to retract the accusation within hours.

Apart from the daily abuse suffered by the youth at the hands of the police, the experience of the 2005 rioting lends credence to scepticism about police accounts. The upheavals at that time were ignited when two boys attempting to escape a police chase were electrocuted and received no assistance from their pursuers. The friends of the boys were not believed when they challenged police denials about the details of the event, subsequently proven to be lies.

The BBC quoted the comment of a brother of one of the dead teenagers, Omar Sehhouli, who said the rioting "was not violence, but an expression of rage."

On the third night of the clashes between youth and police north of Paris, the disturbances spread to the municipalities of Sarcelles, Garges-lès-Gonesse, Cergy, Ermont and Goussainville. The youth, many of them from immigrant families living on bleak working class estates, expressed their anger and despair by burning cars, and trashing and setting fire to schools, libraries and two police stations. The police report 130 injured over the three nights.

The media has claimed that firearms have been used against the police. *Le Monde* November 29 reports an enquiry into "two policemen with lead shot wounds." The hysteria over the alleged shots being fired will no doubt be used to implement new measures of state repression.

The hijacking and torching of a bus in Les Mureaux near Paris and 20 car burnings in Toulouse on Tuesday night have been taken as an extension of the Villiers-le-Bel rebellion.

The scope of the reaction has obliged President Nicolas Sarkozy, who received the families of the dead boys at the Elysée palace, to announce "an independent judicial enquiry" into the deaths of Larami and Moushin. Sarkozy garnered more media coverage, however, by ostentatiously visiting the wounded police.

Villiers-le-Bel was not affected by the 2005 riots, but shares many characteristics with the other impoverished *banlieues*—an official unemployment rate of over 20 per cent, poor transport links with the city centre and a large youthful population. Out of its 27,000 inhabitants, 60 per cent are under 25.

Interviewed in *Libération* November 27, sociologist Jean-Marc Stébé pointed out that the conditions of youth in areas like Villiers-le-Bel had not improved since 2005:

“The National Observatory for Sensitive Urban Areas (ZUS) notes that in 2007, unemployment, pauperisation, have not improved. You can see that still today, amongst the youth able to work, 39.5 percent are unemployed,” i.e., practically twice the national rate.

The Socialist Party mayor of Clichy, where Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna died escaping the police in 2005, told *Libération*:

“Since the autumn of 2005, the situation has not improved. The inhabitants of the neighbourhoods feel forgotten. Problems such as the improvement of transport to break out of isolation are not advancing, yet there are high expectations. Public action is so slow that it is becoming intolerable for people who have been putting up with frustrations for too long.”

He did not detail, needless to say, the role of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party in local and national governments who have presided over the running down of the council estates that exist on the outskirts of every major French town.

An interview posted on the *Nouvel Observateur* web site November 28 with Marie-Michelle Pisani, in charge of the Local Mission, whose purpose is to enable youth from 16 to 25 who have dropped out of school and are unemployed to get work, gives a vivid picture of the problems they face.

Pisani confirmed that “nothing has been done for the youth since the urban explosion of 2005 ... I’m not astonished by the violence, you’ve been able to sense that it’s going to explode for a long time, there’s such despair, the feeling that the future is blocked.”

She said that since 2005 “they’ve been announcing a Marshall Plan for the suburbs, but I’ve seen no change ... Many associations that maintained the social fabric in the neighbourhoods have had their funding cut.”

The sense of being permanently under siege comes across powerfully in interviews given to the press by inhabitants of Villiers-le-Bel. Hussein, a construction worker from Mali, told the *Times*: “You can say that Sarkozy did this,” as he stood near where the boys had died, marked by some bouquets of flowers. “Sarkozy trains the cops like attack dogs and they come in here and treat the kids worse than animals.”

The actions of the French bourgeois politicians, deeply hostile to the youth, are one aspect of the situation. But the greatest culpability falls to the French “left,” from the Socialist Party to the “far left” of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR) and *Lutte ouvrière*, all of whom, in the end, are respectable parties of order. Their obstinate refusal to offer a socialist solution to the crisis of French capitalism, despite numerous opportunities, most recently the mass strikes of rail workers and others earlier this month, is the principal reason why the youth react with frustration and rage and not a conscious opposition to capitalism.

In one way or another, the entire left is lined up against the youth. The statements of Socialist Party (PS) officials have all condemned the revolt of the youth and called for community policing. The PS president of the Paris regional (Ile de France) council, Jean-Pierre Huchon, issued a statement on Monday:

“I condemn such an outburst of violence and destruction towards firemen, the police, the public services and the enterprises ... I send my wishes for the injured superintendent’s recovery and his colleagues.”

François Hollande, the first secretary of the Socialist Party, issued an entirely empty statement calling for social, educational and “Republican” measures and made an appeal to nationalism: “The Republic is the answer, a common conception of the nation. We must talk of citizenship and the Nation.”

The UNSA (National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions, close to the Socialist Party) stated in a communiqué issued Monday:

“We must re-establish a police presence in the places where it’s necessary, seven days a week and 24 hours a day. We must establish a real policy of occupation of the neighbourhoods on the one hand, get to know the local population better and on the other hand, to facilitate more efficient repression because that’s getting ever more necessary.”

This is from the “left”!

Meanwhile, Patrice Ribeiro, the national secretary of the Synergie police union, evoked a civil war-type confrontation with the youth: He told RTL radio:

“But if this continues like this, we fear a tragedy on one side or the other because our colleagues will not let themselves be shot at like that indefinitely without firing back. ... It’s urban guerrilla warfare with conventional weapons and hunting rifles.”

The media reported that Prime Minister François Fillon told firemen while visiting Villiers-le-Bel “We will not let go. We will fight with all the force the nation is capable of.” He continued: “The government is totally determined to act to bring back order to the land ... all means will be made available to the police in order to achieve this.” There is no reason to believe these are empty threats.

Minister of the Interior Michèle Alliot-Marie declared that the police occupation force would be kept in Villiers-le-Bel as long as was necessary and that again on Wednesday night there would be a police officer for every 27 inhabitants. Delinquents could expect “no tolerance.” She has lyingly characterised this outburst of frustration and rage as “acts of organised delinquency.”

The pretence that the government will increase spending to alleviate conditions in the miserable suburbs has been dropped by some members of Sarkozy’s UMP (Union for a Popular Movement). One deputy, Jacques Myard, let loose with a racist diatribe. “Let’s open our eyes,” he said, according to the *Financial Times*. “The problem is not economic. The reality is that an anti-French ethno-cultural bias from a foreign society has taken root on French soil and it is feeding on basic anti-French racism even if the rioters have French nationality.”



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