

November 6, 2005

# French Ministers Meet Under Growing Pressure From Riots

By [CRAIG S. SMITH](#)

PARIS, Nov. 6 - The French government met in emergency session today to confront rioting that worsened on its 10th night, sweeping into the heart of Paris from suburbs with large Arab and African populations.

Afterward, President [Jacques Chirac](#) said the government was determined "to be stronger than those who want to sow violence or fear."

"Today, the highest priority is the return of security and public order," Mr. Chirac said after the unusual 6 p.m. Sunday meeting of the interior security council. "The last word must be from the law."

Mr. Chirac, who had summoned Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin and the ministers of defense, justice, economy and the interior to Élysée Palace, indicated that the group had agreed on certain steps both to curb the unrest and to address some of its underlying problems.

"We well understand that the evolution of things hinges on the respect of everybody, justice and equality," Mr. Chirac said, though he also warned that comprehensive action on grievances had a "prerequisite," which he emphasized was "the return of security and public order."

Mr. Chirac is under growing political and popular pressure to stop the rioting, which has spread to towns across [France](#) and resulted in at least 800 arrests, including of boys as young as 13.

Just the day before, Prime Minister de Villepin met with eight of his ministers and a top Muslim official in an effort to find a way to break the chain of violent events.

Dozens of cars were burned overnight in Paris, the worst night of violence thus far and the first time the unrest entered the capital - near the Place de la République neighborhood, northeast of City Hall and near the historic Marais district. All told, the police said, 3,300 buses, cars and other vehicles had been set afire and numerous buildings have been destroyed or seriously damaged nationwide since Oct. 27, when the disturbances began.

The authorities today continued to reflect popular frustration with their inability to stop what many are calling France's worst civil unrest since the 1968 student revolts.

Until today, Mr. Chirac, who is under pressure even within his own ruling party, had said little publicly about the wave of disturbances. On Wednesday, a spokesman said the president had warned that "tempers must calm down" and that further escalation would be "dangerous."

But while Mr. Chirac had guarded his words, the interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, had not, inspiring enmity in the streets by calling troublemakers "scum."

Overnight, the police called up 2,300 reinforcements but were still unable to quell the sporadic lawlessness. Seven police helicopters buzzed over the Paris region through the night, videotaping outbreaks of disturbances and directing mobile squads to various incidents. Firefighters were also active as cars and buildings were set afire.

"This is just the beginning," Moussa Diallo, 22, said this afternoon in Clichy-sous-Bois, a low-income suburb, where the protests began after two teenagers of Mauritanian and Tunisian background died while fleeing the police in what officials said was an accident.

"It's not going to end until there are two policeman dead," said Mr. Diallo, whose parents came to France from [Mali](#). Mr. Diallo did not admit to taking part in any violence himself.

Rampaging youths have attacked property in cities as far away as Toulouse and Marseilles and the resort towns of Cannes and Nice, and in Strasbourg to the north. The police describe them as copycat attacks, all the more difficult to control because the violence and destruction are decentralized.

In its early days, the rioting appeared to spread spontaneously, but law enforcement officials now say said it is being abetted by the Internet.

Worse, the national police spokesman Patrick Hamon said, "What we notice is that the bands of youths are, little by little, getting more organized," and are sending attack messages by mobile phone texts.

But sentiment online is diverse. Some Web sites mourn the two teenagers who died last month; others issue insults to the police; but some warn that the uprisings will only give the anti-immigrant far-right an opportunity.

Prime Minister de Villepin, who called in police officers and teachers working in deprived areas for talks, has released no details to date of a promised action plan for 750 tough neighborhoods.

"I'll make proposals as early as this week," the weekly Journal du Dimanche quoted him as saying.

The Socialist Party leader Francois Hollande said the riots were a failure of government policy and leadership.

"I want to hear Jacques Chirac today," Mr. Hollande told reporters. "Where is the president when such serious events are taking place?"

Government authorities have so far found no way beyond appeals and more police to address a problem with complex social, economic and racial causes and depths of hostilities in France. The country has a population of 5 million Muslims, the most in Western Europe.

"Many youths have never seen their parents work and couldn't hold down a job if they got one," Claude Chevallier, manager of a burned-out carpet depot in the rundown Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois, said with asperity.

Interior Minister Sarkozy visited police officers overnight in the troubled Essonne and Val-de-Marne areas near Paris. Two schools were destroyed in the Essonne and cars continued to go up in flames during the night.

The worst unrest overnight appeared to be centered on Evreux, 100 kilometers west of Paris, where at least 50 vehicles, shops and businesses and a post office and two schools were destroyed.

Five police officers and three firefighters were injured in Evreux during clashes with the young rioters, Mr. Hamon said.

"This is too much, stop!" a woman in Evreux complained to a Reuters reporter. "Stop, do something else, but not this, not violence."

Evreux's mayor, Jean-Louis Debre, a Chirac confidant who is speaker of the lower house of Parliament, told reporters at the scene: "A hundred people have smashed everything and strewn desolation. Well, they don't form part of our universe."

In Evry, a southern Parisian suburb, The Associated Press reported that the authorities had found 150 explosive devices in what was described as a de facto firebomb-making factory. A senior Justice Ministry official, Jean-Marie Huet, said today that more than 100 bottles, as well as gallons of fuel and hoods for hiding rioters' faces, had been found in the rundown building.

On Saturday morning, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Muslim leaders led a march of about 2,000 people in Aulnay-sous-Bois, one of the affected suburbs. The parents of the two teenagers who died while hiding from the police touched off the rioting also issued a statement appealing for calm.

Many see the violence as a test of wills between Interior Minister Sarkozy and the young, mostly French Arab rioters. Numerous immigrants and their children blame Mr. Sarkozy for alienating young people

with the way he has pressed a zero-tolerance anticrime campaign, which features frequent police checks of French Arabs in poor neighborhoods. But he has ignored calls from many French Arabs to resign, and is keeping up the pressure.

During a visit to a police command center west of Paris on Saturday, according to local news reports, he told officers, "Arrests - that's the key."

Ironically, Mr. Sarkozy, himself a second-generation immigrant, has been one of the loudest champions of affirmative action and of relaxing rules that restrict government support for building mosques.

The government has been embarrassed by its inability to quell the disturbances, which have called into question its unique integration model, which discourages recognizing ethnic, religious or cultural differences in favor of French unity. There is no affirmative action, for example, and religious symbols, like the Muslim veil, are banned in schools.

"The republican integration model, on which France has for decades based its self-perception, is in flames," the German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung declared. An editorial in [Germany's Süddeutsche Zeitung](#) called the violence around Paris an "intifada at the city gates," a reference to the anti-Israeli uprising by Palestinians.

The French approach to integration is one of three basic models in Europe, which has faced large-scale non-European immigration only in the postwar era.

Germany and [Austria](#) pursued a now largely discredited "guest worker" policy that was based on the notion that immigrants were temporary laborers who would eventually go home. But the guest workers did not go home, and their European-born children have begun demanding citizenship and equal rights.

While it is still difficult to become a citizen in Germany, there has been a strong wave of naturalizations in recent years and children born there to foreign parents now receive citizenship at birth.

[Britain](#) has followed a policy closer to that of the [United States](#), extending citizenship to newcomers and encouraging strong ethnic communities. Immigrants arriving from Commonwealth countries in the 1950's and 1960's enjoyed immediate voting rights until Margaret Thatcher put an end to the practice in 1981. But the law created politically powerful immigrant communities.

France, too, has offered citizenship to its immigrants, but the process was slower, and many of the Algerians who arrived to work in the wake of their country's bitter war of independence against France were reluctant to take up French citizenship. Not until naturalizations became more common in the 1980's did immigrants and their adult children begin to develop political power.

The country has tried to discourage "ghettoization" by ignoring ethnic or religious differences and

emphasizing French identity above all. Until the early 1980's, foreigners needed government approval to form associations.

But discrimination has flourished behind the oft-stated ideals, leaving immigrants and their French-born offspring increasingly isolated in government-subsidized apartment blocks to face high unemployment and dwindling hope for the future.

- [Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#)
  - [Home](#)
  - [Privacy Policy](#)
    - [Search](#)
  - [Corrections](#)
    - [XML](#)
    - [Help](#)
  - [Contact Us](#)
  - [Work for Us](#)
    - [Site Map](#)
  - [Back to Top](#)