

Racism and Social Apartheid. French Suburbs: 10 Questions

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1. Will France Abolish Apartheid?

We are witnessing a strange phenomenon: French political leaders are all rushing to appear on television with a pleasant but hypocritical tone: *"We understand you, and we're going to do something for you."* Everyone knows the cause of the problem and everyone knows what has to be done.

But then, if you already knew what to do, then why have you been doing the exact opposite for the last thirty years? And most of all, why did you persist doing the exact opposite in recent years? Why, over the last two years, has the French government ended support to local initiatives? Who cut 15% of the funds allocated to the 2006 budget to fight unsanitary housing? Who replaced the local police with the CRS [Compagnies Republicaines de Sécurité, i.e., the French riot police] and their humiliating systematic and arbitrary arrests, which even Amnesty denounced as violent and racist in character in their most recent report?

2. What Are You Hiding?

One of two things. Or else you leaders would really know what was the cause of the problems, namely, social injustice, the "no future", and still you did nothing, then why should we trust you from now on? Or else you don't have the solution, because social injustice is at the heart of your system, and you don't want to touch the privileges of the wealthy, and then why should we trust you in the future?

3. "Violence Solves Nothing"?

One more time, good Sirs. Would you please be so kind as to indicate to the poor what method of struggle you would suggest to them since none other has been understood and that their situation is only getting worse!

And most of all, please be a bit less hypocritical! By what method did the French bourgeoisie begin to build its great fortunes if not on the slave trade, and the subsequent plundering of Africa's wealth? Were the French going to bring bouquets of flowers to the Algerians, the Moroccans and other peoples that they occupied and massacred? And, even today, in several neocolonies which create fortunes for multinationals like Total and Bouygues, but create misery for local populations?

4. Where Lies the Greatest Violence?

What word should be used to qualify a system which, on the one hand, accumulates colossal fortunes while always destroying employment, and which, on the other hand, piles millions of people into ghettos, unsanitary housing, deteriorating housing projects, low quality schools, little jobs with no future, and “in your face” police harassment?

Each year, more and more people must survive on insufficient incomes while all levels of government keep lowering taxes for colossal fortunes. Each year, hundreds of people die on the streets of Paris. What word qualifies a system that gives a young person no way out: *“I don't care about going to prison. My life is already wasted as it stands now.”* Isn't this system violent itself?

5. “Well, We're not in the United States?”

said the European media during the Katrina-Bush scandal. But aren't we going down the same road at top speed? With the European Constitution and Bolkestein and all those measures applied throughout Europe after the Lisbon Accords (2000), aren't we witnessing an all-out offensive that is lowering salaries, pensions, and social spending? Aren't we about to catch up with Bush and his 40 millions people on the threshold of poverty?

Isn't the present obsession of making older people work longer before retirement the best way of producing a mass of unemployed young people who have no hope? Is it normal that the workers at Shell-Netherlands had to go on strike in order to save their right to a pension when the profits of this multinational exploded (18 billion dollars in 2004, and 68% more this year)? Isn't it necessary, on the contrary, to radically reduce the number of work hours in order to save jobs? And isn't the only obstacle the untouchable character of the super-profits of big corporations, that are modestly draped by the lovely word “competitiveness”?

6. Human Beings Hurlled into the Garbage?

When young people set fire to cars, the media care. But why the silence when their lives were going up in smoke? Can we still believe in the myth of climbing the alleged “social ladder” when we hear one more great Western economist coldly declare: *“There are six billion people in the world, of whom five billion will never be made use of”*? Aren't we living in an inhumane system? Some are exploited to the very core of their being, others are literally “hurlled” into the garbage? Must the society of the future be based on the profits of multinationals or on the needs of humanity?

7. A Strategy to Divide?

Of course, to burn your neighbor's car in the suburbs is playing in the cards of the regime. Because this car which your neighbor uses to go to work (to be exploited to the max), this neighbor is also a victim of a European policy imposed by multinational corporations. Just like the pensioner who is plunged into financial insecurity when the powers that be whittle away his means of existence.

And aren't the powers that be rightly afraid that the various resistance movements are uniting against such exploitation? Isn't racism deliberately fed by presenting inflated statistics and distortions of small delinquency while those in white collars are protected? To present the Muslims as dangerous when there are extremists everywhere; isn't the criminalization of the wearing of headscarves voluntarily concealing the social question behind a false problem of religion? In order to better pit the victims of exploitation against

each other.

The strategy, a brilliant stroke of genius, has been to lock up the poorest in ghettos and erect a wall of cops around them in order to divide and break the resistances. As long as the little Whites Boys keep taking it out on little Black Boys and little Beurs [North Africans born in France of immigrant parents, Translator's Note], the very wealthy (whose money doesn't have any color) can sleep tight.

And the big problem is that Sarkozy's demagoguery is doing very well. When this big bourgeois prepares an antisocial policy along the lines of Bush, his discourse goes over very well with the majority of workers not only in France but also in Belgium. We've got a big job on our hands there!

8. What Is Sarkozy PushingFor?

Of course, his rivals are hypocritically trying to make him take responsibility and knock him out of the presidential elections. But at the same time, they're happy that he's doing the dirty work for him. Because everyone knows that the social problem is only just beginning, and that the revolt will not disappear. Hence, his usefulness.

Well before the riots, Sarkozy had prepared liberticidal laws that target us all and that are going to be put in place throughout the entire E.U.: wiretapping, Internet espionage, extraditions for political offenses, arbitrary expulsions.... Sarkozy, after having deliberately created tensions, is going to exploit them in order to pass such anti-democratic legislation. Which he will also use against social and labor movements. And against our freedom of speech (don't forget that he had a young immigrant imprisoned for having "insulted" him).

9. What Solutions Present Themselves?

Those who "well understand the restlessness of the young" are assuring us that some more money is going to be spent for the suburbs, and they will let return local police and social workers whom they eliminated. However, cops and social workers will only be able to keep things calm for a short period of time, and they won't be creating any jobs. You need a real job in order to integrate into society, and you have to make some real money.

But as long as the system is based on the interest and maximum profits of the few, how will it be possible to create the necessary jobs and satisfy the needs of the population? If we want them to stop dumping people into the garbage, isn't it time to replace the law of the jungle by a superior form of human relations? Today, it is perfectly possible to end world hunger: that would cost less than a quarter of the annual budget of the US Army. Well, then?

10. To Leave them in their Ghetto?

It is too easy to reproach the young people in the suburbs for not having a program, and for missing the mark. At the beginning of the existence of the working class, overexploited workers started breaking the machines, which was just as suicidal. The real question is: where are their clearly articulated demands going to come from, and the analysis of the causes of their suffering?

What did the labor movement, what did progressive intellectuals do to overcome the division between these young people and all the other exploited classes of people ? To

overcome such divisions, it is absolutely necessary to make bridges and communicate the experience acquired during past struggles. But, before becoming a professor, one has to be a student. Stay tuned. Because the “hatred” of these young people is not a negative feeling. It is indignation against injustice. And this feeling has always been, throughout history, the point of departure for resistance and for changing the world.

And Now?

Now, here are just a few questions to launch the debate. You can react to them by sending commentaries, testimonies to: michel.collon@skynet.be A forum called «Banlieues» (in French) will make its appearance on www.michelcollon.info which also offers other texts and testimonies (see below).

In two weeks, we’re going to be publishing a short book « Bush, the hurricane » that covers these same questions. How can we explain in a simple and straightforward fashion to those around us these infamous economic laws that lead to poverty, war and crime? Sarkozy, but other leaders, as well, are copying what Bush is doing to the USA, and are preparing such policies for France and Europe. It is thus a question of understanding our social system as an ensemble.

- Where are all these poor people coming from?
- Why unemployment and misery are necessary.
- What purpose does the State serve?
- The great media taboos.
- Is Europe any different from Bush?
- Five billion people are useless?

In order to be advised of the publication of the book, and to debate: michel.collon@skynet.be

THE FRENCH SUBURBS: See ALSO (in French):

Saïd Bouamama - « On est dans une économie qui sacrifie les pauvres »

<http://www.michelcollon.info/articles.php?dateaccess=2005-11-10%2007:47:23&log=invites>

Tariq Ramadan - « C’est l’ensemble de la classe politique française qui se trompe »

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