



## Mugged by la Réalité

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FRIDRIC ENCEL, PROFESSOR OF international relations at the prestigious Ecole Nationale d'Administration in Paris and a man not known for crying wolf, recently stated that France is becoming a new Lebanon. The implication, far-fetched though it may seem, was that civil upheaval might be no more than a few years off, sparked by growing ethnic and religious polarization. In recent weeks, a series of events has underlined this ominous trend.

On March 8, tens of thousands of high school students marched through central Paris to protest education reforms announced by the government. Repeatedly, peaceful demonstrators were attacked by bands of black and Arab youths--about 1,000 in all, according to police estimates. The eyewitness accounts of victims, teachers, and most

interestingly the attackers themselves gathered by the left-wing daily *Le Monde* confirm the motivation: racism.

Some of the attackers openly expressed their hatred of "little French people." One 18-year-old named Heikel, a dual citizen of France and Tunisia, was proud of his actions. He explained that he had joined in just to "beat people up," especially "little Frenchmen who look like victims." He added with a satisfied smile that he had "a pleasant memory" of repeatedly kicking a student, already defenseless on the ground.

Another attacker explained the violence by saying that "little whites" don't know how to fight and "are afraid because they are cowards." Rachid, an Arab attacker, added that even an Arab can be considered a "little white" if he

"has a French mindset." The general sentiment was a desire to "take revenge on whites."

Sometimes petty theft appeared to be the initial motivation. One or two bullies would approach a student and ask for money or a cell phone. Even if the victim complied right away, they would start beating him or her. A striking account was provided by Luc Colpart, a history and geography teacher and member of the far-left union SUD. Colpart said the scenes of violence were so disturbing that he could not sleep for days. He saw students being beaten or pulled by the hair. He stressed that assailants who stole cell phones smashed them in front of their victims: "It was a game. Hatred and fun."

Colpart, who is active in anti-racist causes, confirmed that "these were racial assaults," and the attackers used "far-right slurs, violent and racist." One black student he saw come to the defense of a fellow student under attack by three blacks was called "a white sell-out" by the assailants. Some scores of victims were taken to hospitals. Those who were interviewed confirmed that they had been caught up in an "anti-white" rampage and that the cops did nothing to protect them.

In response to this event, a group of leading public figures, along with 1,000 high school students, issued a statement denouncing "anti-white" pogroms. Among them were the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, the journalist Jacques Julliard from the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur*, former minister of public health and founder of Doctors Without Borders Bernard Kouchner, bestselling Iranian-born author Chahdortt Djavann, the journalist Ghaleb Bencheikh, and the film director Elie Chouraqui. At a press conference announcing the release of the statement on March 25, Finkielkraut denounced Francophobia and Judeophobia.

Julliard, writing in the *Nouvel Observateur*, expressed dismay at the lack of public outcry over this display of racial hatred. He added that the left had already made the mistake of not denouncing violence in schools or soaring crime rates. And he sharply rejected the view endorsed by most left-wing organizations and individuals that the violence was an expression of class struggle, a clash between rich and poor. "Anyone should be ashamed," Julliard wrote, "after all we went through in the 20th century, to offer such a coarse explanation. . . . There is no good and bad racism."

Interestingly enough, Serge Romano, a leading representative of the black community who did not sign the public statement, readily admitted, "The young people came to beat up whites." He called the event "a catastrophe," but added, "we unfortunately expected it." One of the major anti-racist organizations, LICRA (Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme), pointed out that the same people and organizations who failed to recognize the wave of anti-Semitism in France beginning in 2000-2001 are today unwilling to face up to an outbreak of racial violence.

By coincidence, last week the French government's human rights commission delivered to Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin its 2004 report on racism and anti-Semitism in France. The report underscores a worrisome pattern of retreat into separate ethnic communities. And the evidence of hostility is sobering: The number of violent acts and threats nearly doubled, from 833 in 2003 to a record 1,565 in 2004. Of these, 62 percent were directed against Jews, who make up just 1 percent of France's population.

These figures, of course, capture only incidents sufficiently severe to come to

the attention of the authorities. Beneath the radar are other incidents, seemingly petty, yet telling, such as one I happened to witness in a Paris department store a few months back. A woman was pushing her baby in a stroller down an aisle. Behind her was a well-dressed, prosperous-looking Arab woman in a hurry. Suddenly the Arab woman pushed the mother, saying, "Move, dirty Frenchwoman" ("*Dégage, sale française*"). The familiar epithet "dirty Jew" is apparently being extended for more general use.

Another remarkable verbal innovation is the use of the word "Gaulois"--an inhabitant of Gaul, the part of the Roman Empire that became France--to identify the non-Jewish, non-Muslim, non-black French. Today, the term is used mostly by Muslims and blacks, but, amazingly enough, French whites are starting to pick it up as the rift between ethnic communities grows wider. Journalist Stéphanie Marteau, in an online interview about her new book on Muslim France, for example, speaks of "the Gaulois vote."

Nowhere are the new tensions more obvious than in schools, as documented in a report on the Islamization of French schools delivered to the minister of education in late 2004 by the inspector general of national education, Jean-Pierre Obin. Not publicly released at the time, it has since been leaked and

posted on the website *Proche-Orient.info*.

Obin discusses the attitudes of Muslim students, some as young as first graders. He reports, for instance, that Muslim students, asked their nationality, answer, "Muslim." When they are told that this is not a nationality and they are French, some insist that they can't be French since they are Muslim. This should come as no surprise. The presidential commission that examined the issue of secularism in 2003 reported that "extremist groups are working to test the Republic's strength and push some young people to reject France and her values."

Obin concludes his report with an appeal to the lucidity and courage of French leaders. So far, however, the Chirac administration has shown little willingness to address the new racism. It was similarly slow to recognize the largest wave of anti-Semitic vandalism to hit France since the 1930s. And Chirac personally blundered last July 14, when, in the course of his traditional Bastille Day press interview, he distinguished between "our Jewish and Muslim compatriots" and "just plain French." Jacques Chirac must know that fraternity is one of the pillars of the French Republic. If it crumbles, the whole house will collapse.

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