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# French Banlieues and Urban Guerrillas

Yves Coleman

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15 October 2007

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quently, the line ‘Go home, white boy, we don’t need you’ quoted at the very beginning of Quadrelli’s article is particularly inaccurate, not to say silly, in an article dealing with social realities in France. That is one of many reasons why the working class – whatever the colour or nationality of its members – is the only potent liberating force if any socialist revolution is ever to occur.

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racial dimension above class struggle, oppressed members of the formerly dominant racial or ethnic group become the target of a strong suspicion, and then provide the perfect scapegoat and object for the expression of national and racial hate when the new ‘non-White’ power proves incapable of fulfilling its promises. These national-ethnic contradictions are also evident in the Islamist guerrilla movements in Lebanon or in Iraq. Even within the Muslim Umma, imaginary national and ethnic elements are stronger than supposed (Muslim) religious unity. To continually stress ‘race’ in social conflicts – the concepts ‘White’ and ‘Black’ have a long negative history – even if this is conceived as a provisional step preparing a larger unity later on, has until now led only to a dead-end.

Promoting Blackness as a way of radically changing society is absurd in a country where the majority of the population is and will continue to be ‘White’. If one wants to efficiently promote ‘Black’ pride and to get more power inside this bourgeois society, there are only two realistic solutions: either one calls for the development of separate communities (something which generally does not bother the capitalist class) – that’s the position of the Ka Tribe;

or one cynically fights to integrate a larger fraction of the ‘Beurgoisie’ or ‘Blackgeoisie’ inside the ‘White’ establishment – that’s the position of the CRAN.

There are no detailed ethnic statistics in France but even if you have 3 million French ‘Blacks’ (who have at least one African or West Indian parent) and 3 million French ‘Arabs’ (who have an Arab, Turkish, Berber, Iranian or Middle Eastern parent), the ‘Non-Whites’ (mixing all social classes together) represent less than 10 percent of French population. So it’s rather obvious that building a strategy on pitting the ‘Whites’ against the ‘non-Whites’ won’t lead anywhere in France, as in all other European imperialist states.

There is very little chance that ‘Black’ populations will ever be a demographic majority in imperialist metropolises. Conse-

and MPs who are trying to find some oxygen for their dying party.

If 'ethnic pride' can be a powerful weapon for minorities, it's politically interesting for revolutionaries only if it leads to a broader revolutionary perspective. When Malcolm X was jailed for being a pimp and decided he could be proud of his skin colour and his African roots, or when he was a member of the Nation of Islam espousing racist and anti-semitic theories, he was not a menace to American capitalism. He started becoming dangerous when he slowly broadened his vision, even while maintaining his religious beliefs. The reference to the Blackness of the oppressed does not solve anything: it does not impede 'Blacks' from dreaming of climbing up the social scale by any means necessary. As Quadrelli's interviews themselves show, this is what is already happening inside the French reformist left, and, surprisingly, it's a phenomenon growing even among the right-wing parties. Promoting Blackness, or criticising the 'post-colonial' character of the situation of the 'banlieusards', does not offer us any reliable basis for an alliance of all the oppressed whatever their skin colour. It rests on the (absurd and fundamentally religious) idea that all oppressed 'Whites' should identify with the 'non-White' oppressed; that they should feel guilty and identify themselves with the descendants of slaves and colonised people (this is clearly the 'theory' of the Indigènes de la République which seems very close to Quadrelli's and his guerrillaist friends' conceptions). As if serfdom and capitalist wage slavery had been or remain a luxurious condition for oppressed and exploited 'White' proletarians!

Such an idea is totally baroque, as was demonstrated to the few 'Whites' who actively supported the 'Black' guerrilla movements in former colonial countries: in most cases (South Africa being for the moment an exception, but for how long?) they left the country after some years of independence, if not before. When one puts the national dimension, and the pseudo

*The paradox of a guerrillaist practice developed outside a civil war lies in the following: the restorative justice which sustains the socialist idea can only be substituted by its contrary, the violent idea of a punitive justice which, by its very nature, can't realise the socialist aim. Guerrillaist 'propaganda' functions as a penal sanction, because it is impossible to liberate 'occupied zones'. Therefore guerrillaist practice is reduced to a sort of parallel State, itself reduced to its main function: a criminal court.*

– Vincenzo Guagliardo, imprisoned member of the Brigade Rosse

The four following texts try to respond to Emilio Quadrelli's hypotheses about the 'riots' of November 2005's and the positions advanced by his interviewees. The questions discussed are complex and should be handled cautiously and methodically. Passion and hate fuel the class struggle, and there is nothing wrong with that. Capitalism is a pitiless social system which needs to be destroyed by violence. But if one aims to present a general political analysis one must get beyond the surface of one's subjective revulsion for the system.

The first text, 'Riots and Fairytales for Radicals', deals with the most important factual errors and exaggerations in Quadrelli's article, which I can best sum up as 'political fairytales'. Quadrelli and his interviewees offer either a distorted or a false vision of French social and political realities. These errors could have been easily avoided if Quadrelli had not taken 'grassroots political militants' words for granted and had confronted them with other available data. Strangely enough, Quadrelli spends much energy attacking French intellectuals close to the anti-globalisation movement, moderate feminists, or the 'Caviar Left' and 'bobos' (bourgeois bohemians) – people who have no links with the proletarian suburbs, and whose few analyses were not even used by the dominant class during or after November 2005. His criticisms would have been much more accurate and useful if he had dealt with the numerous social scientists, either politically 'neutral' or close to

the Communist and Socialist parties, or to the 'alter-globalist' movement, who waged a 'paper riot' as one of them ironically put it, organising conferences and colloquia, writing books and articles, and above all flooding the State with their reports and good advice for better policing, increased justice and greater 'diversité' in the media and political elites. Let's also note that Quadrelli's reference to and reverence for the 'lucid' Michel Foucault is laughable when one recalls that this intellectual successively entertained illusions about the French Stalinist CP, the Mao-Spontaneists of the '70s, Khomeini's 'Islamic revolution' and the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour) trade union.[1] He thought the Socialist Party was not radical enough because of its alliance with the CP (that shows the depth of his illusions about social democracy) and declared that he would have advised the Socialist government if they had asked his opinion about questions such as prisons...

My second text, 'Forces of Repression and Urban Guerrillas' describes the police forces in France and some of their repressive functions. I offer this in response to the claim that 'the urban guerrilla must have a great ability for observation. He must be well-informed about everything, particularly about the enemy's movements [2] as a 'White' revolutionary once wrote.[3]

The third text, 'Some Hypotheses About Armed Struggle and Guerrilla Warfare' gives a schematic overview of various forms of armed struggle in the former colonial world and the imperialist metropolises.

The final text, 'The Racialisation of Social Questions Leads Nowhere' tries to respond to pseudo-concepts linked to old and imaginary conceptions about 'race' on the left and far left.

Despite the harshness of the critiques expressed in these articles, it is obvious that the essential work remains to be done, both theoretically and practically. But it would be catastrophic if the present radical youth repeats exactly the same mistakes

think that the BPP was in any way, feminist or revolutionary socialist.

Apart from the right to carry weapons for one's self-defence (a right guaranteed in theory by the US constitution), the BPP's ideas were not so different from the ideas of contemporary French rap artists who promote the idea that for victims of racism in the banlieue the only option is to create their own businesses or to use the ballot. Actually, this is what many post-graduate Franco-Africans and Franco-North Africans do already, since they don't feel like waiting 10 years before getting a badly paid job in the private sector. The 'Blackgeoisie' already has its lobby (the CRAN, the Representative Council of Black associations). The 'Beurgeoisie' is experiencing a small delay in terms of organisation but, thanks to President Sarkozy and the UMP (uniting the traditional Gaullists, the free trade right and part of the Centre), it already has two icons – Fadela Amara (secretary of State for urban problems, i.e. the suburbs) and Rachida Dati, Minister of Justice, both daughters of North-African workers. (Rachida Dati was welcomed by a friendly 'riot' of enthusiastic French-North Africans when she visited Les Minguettes, the council estate where she lived during her childhood and youth... and where serious riots took place in 1981 and 1983).

On the 'Left', there is only one group trying to racialise political questions in a verbally radical way: the Indigènes de la République. In other words, they radically denounce French nationalism, but hail Algerian, Palestinian or Arab nationalism. But most of their demands are in fact very moderate, and are (or could be) integrated in the official programs of bourgeois and reformist parties. Given its social composition, this movement presently looks much more like a small and not very efficient lobby of French-North African professionals than a mass 'Black' working class organisation. Its membership consists of teachers, lawyers, social workers, allied with Franco-French academics struggling for recognition and some Stalinist cadres

This is exactly what the Indigènes de la République call the *Indigènes* (a term used in the French colonial Empire to name indigenous ‘non-White’ people).

Quadrelli and his guerillist friends are afraid to say that the suburbs (at least the working class districts) are above all proletarian districts. Apart from the ‘Blacks’ and the ‘Arabs’, says Quadrelli’s informer, ‘a lot of whites in the suburbs have been active in no small way in the riots’. They are afraid to use such basic words as ‘workers’ or ‘proletarians’, as if replacing these concepts by ‘non-whites’ or ‘bad whites’ could solve the main difficulty we are facing: is a revolution possible today in modern imperialist countries? And what are the social classes and layers who have a primary interest in overthrowing by violence the capitalist regime of exploitation and installing a socialist society?

## **2. From the Black Panther Party to the Indigènes de la République: the suicidal racialisation of social questions**

It’s strange that after the total failure of Black nationalist groups in the US, some people still think that the way out is to copy the gross failures of the ’60s. The Ten-point programme of the Black Panther Party (BPP) referred to ‘God’, the ‘Creator’ and the ‘US Constitution’ and explicitly mentioned the ‘separation’ of a Black nation. It believed in a good Black government, good black ‘co-operatives’, that is a good black capitalism: ‘the means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organise and employ all of its people and give a high standard of living’ (point 2). Those who still hold illusions about the BPP should read Elaine Brown’s *A Taste of Power* and David Hilliard’s *The Side of Glory*, two testimonies written by former BPP leaders. It’s difficult after reading these books to

made during the ’60s and ’70s – as Quadrelli and his ‘Black’ [4] guerrillas seem to wish.

# PART ONE – RIOTS AND FAIRYTALES FOR RADICALS

## The invisible guerrillas

The factual basis of Quadrelli's arguments is the testimony of several 'Black' guerrillas. If these men and women really have led numerous attacks on temp agencies and the cars, houses, warehouses and sweatshops of several bosses and foremen, these 21st century 'guerrillas' are probably being actively pursued by the French police forces. On the other hand, it's rather difficult to believe that if 'in the guerrilla war that developed in the banlieues, the entire population, apart from spies and pimps, had a combatant role (...)'; no information was published before 2007 about a guerrilla movement which pretends to have conducted numerous guerrilla actions. These actions have only been revealed in *Il Manifesto* (in Italian) and in *Mute* (in English). I have no idea if they are true, exaggerated or false, as they have not been the object of any detailed debate in France.[5] I can only note that the interviews (as well as Quadrelli's article which never takes any critical distance from them) contain many very vague assertions, gross exaggerations and factual errors, concerning either the November riots or more general facts about French society. Let's start by reviewing some of the most absurd or false assertions. I have listed 18, but could have extended this list.

more than the black nationalists do. In the process, promoting a 'Black' nationalist rhetoric spiced with the concepts of 'post-colonial' studies, the left evades the necessity of imagining its own answers to the questions faced by proletarians who suffer from racism and discrimination.

It's not surprising that a racist group like the Kemi Seba Generation in France (or the Nation of Islam in the States) denounces 'Leucoderms' (Whites). Or that the CRAN, with a different, more 'French Republican', policy, wants more 'Black' bosses, army officers, TV actors or journalists. These two groups have no ambition to crush the State or to attack capitalist rule. They just want a bigger share of the cake, to exploit their brothers and sisters, or simply to acquire a small political niche.

But, it's difficult to understand the reason for the racialisation proposed by Quadrelli and his guerillaist friends. They want to present the 'banlieusards' and thus the rioters in their entirety as 'Blacks'; our distinguished anthropologist refers to 'black political militants', and to 'black neighbourhoods'. Since he probably feels his obsession with Blackness is somewhat absurd, he refers us to Portelli's book without explaining in detail its content:

'Black' is not used with reference to objective skin colour; it refers to those who become 'black' by virtue of the social and political category they are placed in.

Having not read Portelli's book (apparently it deals with the effects of the colour line in the US), and since Quadrelli constantly refers to Fanon and to the so called 'post-colonial' relationship between French city centres and suburbs, I can only suspect that his ideas are close to the Indigènes de la République's 'theory'. O.S. declares to Quadrelli:

'Blacks' refers to all those excluded from the exercise of domination, regardless of the gradations of skin colour...



# The racialisation of social questions leads nowhere

## 1. How radical 'White' multiculturalists patronise their 'non-White' opponents'

I find it particularly irritating that 'White' Western radicals like Quadrelli and one of his interviewees keep dictating to non-'White' radicals which so-called social categories they should belong to (which, just by coincidence, are racial and pseudo-ethnic). They keep distributing good and bad marks to those who are supposedly the good and the bad 'Whites', the good and the bad 'Blacks' (the latter are nicknamed 'Oreos' in the States, 'Bounties' in France, 'Coconuts' in Canada, etc.), the good and the bad 'Arabs', *ad nauseam*. The disqualification strategy used by the left, the accusation of being a traitor to one's 'race' or ethnic group, or of being 'racist' because one refuses to divide humanity into imaginary races, mirrors the bourgeois State's labelling of revolutionaries as unpatriotic or anti-national. It's just a lousy trick.

Confronting racist anti-'White' and anti-Jewish groups promoting 'Black identity' (such as the Ka Tribe, recently banned in France, now called Kemi Seba Generation) or the 'Black lobbies' who want to monopolise the political representation of their 'brothers and sisters' (for instance, the CRAN, Representative Committee of Black Associations, which openly defends this option), the 'White' multiculturalist left (which now even comprises some of the libertarian and Trotskyist groups) has found no other solution than to racialise social questions even

## 1. Sarkozy, the 'scum' and the 'Karcher'

Quadrelli does not mention the context and origin of the sentence he quotes: 'You can't stand these scum any longer? Don't worry, we'll get rid of them soon.' The words 'scum' as well as 'Karcher' (the latter quoted in one of the interviews) were in fact first widely mediated after they were used by two North African (or French-North African) people whom the Minister of the Interior met in La Courneuve and Argenteuil, working-class towns near Paris. One was the parent of Sidi Ahmed Ham-mache, an 11-year-old killed in June 2005 by a stray bullet during a shoot out between two gangs in the '*cit  des 4,000*' (the name of the council estate). The other was a woman living in Argenteuil and talking to the Minister of the Interior from her balcony.

Sarkozy, like any efficient populist politician and demagogue, instantaneously recycled these words (actually the 'Karcher' sentence was leaked to the press and not initially uttered in public): he repeated them for months in the media and the leaders and MPs of the UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, Sarkozy's right wing party) followed suit. These scoundrels knew that these terms were sufficiently ambiguous to satisfy both the 'White' racists and the 'non-Whites' living in difficult conditions and who have the illusion that good local cops could make the difference. It's obviously more comfortable to ignore who first uttered these words, and to argue that part of the 'Black' youth hate Sarkozy for his insulting and implicitly racist words. However it also prevents one from understanding why certain factions of the migrant population and French-North African and French-African people think Sarkozy was right to talk this way, and did not conclude he was racist because he was using words they use everyday to describe residents of their own council estate. It is therefore essential to spot the specificities of Sarkozy's populism to understand his differences from the openly racist Le Pen, and why

Sarkozy not only attracted a high proportion of former Le Pen voters but also got 33 percent of the working class vote during the May 2007 presidential elections.

## **2. Were the cops, and their cars and buildings, the main targets?**

According to M.B.: ‘There has been much talk of cars burned as if this was the only target, but in reality the main targets were others, the police and the police stations obviously (...). Temporary work agencies and state community centres were attacked and destroyed no less than the police stations’; ‘there were also quite a few businesses, ones that use illegal or semi-forced labour exclusively, that went up in flames’, quite a few of these (...) mostly exploit female labour, through piece-work done on domestic premises. Or, in other not so rare cases, adapting for work warehouses and basements where women work almost under concentration camp conditions’. ‘We, and some groups of women (...) settled our accounts with our bosses and guardians while the battle was going on in the streets. When it was impossible to attack the warehouses, we went for their cars and homes. Some caïds met with accidents.’

According to M.B., there was a kind of division of labour: the female rioters dealt with the temp agencies and sweatshops, while the male rioters dealt with the police stations and the cops. If that division of labour really existed, why is it not criticised by the author or by the ‘guerrillas’? Is this division of labour natural? Positive? Or reactionary? Must each gender-based or ‘race’-based ‘community’ choose its specific targets to liberate itself more efficiently? And does such a kind of ‘liberation’ affect capital’s domination?

Let us now confront M.B.’s absurd assertions with the available official statistics:

i) Private buildings:

in France, although they are obsessed by the number of ‘spies’ and the supposed fascist influence in the police forces. They share the illusion that they represent the ‘Black’ masses as if they were defending the interests of a ‘Black’ nation oppressed by a ‘White’ army occupying its territory. They seem to think a riot can be magically transformed into civil war and social revolution (apparently they have not studied previous riots and civil wars, nor their political consequences). They confuse centrally planned insurrections led by military-bureaucratic groups with spontaneous riots; they pretend to be against permanent centralised military structures yet their historical references suggest exactly the opposite.

kill 'class enemies', whom most of the time they did not know and did not hate for any specific personal reasons.

The problem with these testimonies is that former guerrillas stick to their old analysis and say they were basically right at that time; or they think they were obliged to take arms to prevent fascism from taking power or gaining more strength inside society, an explanation which drives them back to the old Resistance bourgeois and Stalinist anti-fascism; or they consider it impossible to make a political assessment because it will endanger people who have never been arrested; or they think they were manipulated by foreign or national secret services; or they see themselves as manipulated by unscrupulous, stupid and crazy leaders; or they believe the blind revolt of their youth transformed them into monsters and inhuman killers; or they are totally broken individuals who look at their political past as a moment of temporary criminal madness. In such conditions, no wonder that a political assessment of urban guerrilla warfare in Western imperialist countries is difficult to make! But until this reckoning is carried out, it is suicidal to just celebrate the good old days of 'left-wing terrorism', or to admire the physical courage of these militants without debating their huge political flaws. Any young radical who today blindly praises the armed violence of the '70s, and the killing of 'class enemies' (Moro, Besse, Schleyer, etc.), should meditate on the lines written in jail by a factory worker from the Red Brigades, Vincenzo Guagliardo, quoted at the beginning of this article. Guagliardo illustrates his point of view very concretely by quoting a popular slogan of the '60s and '70s in Italy: 'To strike one is to educate one hundred'. This phrase was used to justify the act of murdering, or shooting in the legs, foremen, cops, judges, social scientists, etc. As Guagliardo notes, 'terrorist dissuasion' relies on the same principle as bourgeois justice.

The invisible 'guerrillas' quoted by Quadrelli are repeating the same mistakes committed by their various icons: they don't produce any analysis of the political-military relation of forces

There are no statistics about the number of temp agencies or sweatshops attacked or burnt. The State announced that 74 private buildings were destroyed. And the guerrillas don't provide any numbers.

ii) Public buildings:

In France the police own 1,700 buildings: police stations (only open 24/7 in towns with over 20,000 inhabitants); police offices (open during the week but closed after 6 pm); garages, etc. If we believe the official statistics (and Quadrelli does not provide any official or unofficial data), 300 state buildings were attacked (which does not mean they were all destroyed): tax administration centres, unemployment centres, youth cultural centres, childcare centres, *missions locales*, and *maisons de l'emploi* (places where several kinds of social workers try to solve numerous insoluble social problems), town halls... and police stations. If 10 percent of the police buildings (170 of 1,700, taking the most optimistic – and evidently incorrect – evaluation) had been destroyed, I doubt it could have been easily hidden by the French State and all 'White' political forces, as Quadrelli and his guerrillaist friends seem to think.

Apart from the 300 State buildings which were attacked, 30,000 dustbins and 9,500 private cars were burnt, 140 buses were damaged or burnt, as well as 100 cars belonging to the Post Office; 350 schools and 51 post offices were damaged. Why would Sarkozy, at that time Minister of the Interior, have hidden the number of police cars and police stations attacked or burnt, if it had been significant? In the following months his management of the November 2005 crisis only increased his popularity among the 5 million people who traditionally vote for the National Front; Sarkozy would have been very happy to find evidence of authentic urban guerrilla confrontations, and he would have enjoyed the full support of the media in this task, who know that dramatic news attracts readers and viewers.

To my knowledge no central police station was attacked. Only empty local premises closed at night suffered stone throw-

ing and some Molotov cocktails. And as in any 'normal riot' in recent years, mass direct confrontations with the police (excepting the first two days in Clichy-sous-Bois and Montfermeil) were very scarce for two reasons:

- rioters were so few that they understood that a close confrontation with the police would be suicidal;

- the police had very strict instructions not to commit 'bavures' (literally 'unfortunate mistakes', politically correct word for police murders). Sarkozy himself was afraid of repeating the Malik Oussekine debacle – a young student demonstrator living on daily kidney dialysis who, during the student movement of 1986, was beaten up by the cops by 'mistake' (he was leaving a club when he was caught) and died

Contrary to Quadrelli's presentation, street confrontations in November 2005 were much more 'cat and mouse games' than guerrilla fights. As regards the use of guns by rioters, apparently 10 CRS (Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité, riot police) were shot at, as well as two policemen in their car, but none was wounded.

iii) Destruction of police cars:

M.B. pretends that the 'main targets were the police and police stations'. So when one reads Quadrelli's article one can deduce that most burned cars were police cars and not private (working class) cars. As mentioned above, the official number of cars burned was 9,500. The government has not indicated the difference between the various kinds of cars. And Quadrelli has not tried to go into details on this subject either. Only the radical website *Cette Semaine* has given an estimation. Here I will try to work out, following *Cette Semaine*'s figure, how many of the 9,500 cars destroyed were police cars. And I will try to demonstrate that this estimation is absurdly high and false.

Obviously if 95 percent or more of the cars destroyed are not police cars but private cars belonging to local workers then the whole myth concerning the anti-cop character of this car burning activity falls apart. Quadrelli and his friends are not only

regime massacred 200,000 Shia from Southern Iraq and 100,000 Marsh Arabs. If the guerrillas know these facts (and it's difficult to imagine they are ignorant of them, given their third-worldist rhetoric) does this mean that they are already cynical enough to receive the money and protection of such States – as the German Red Army Faction did when their members were helped by the Stalinist Stasi in East Germany, or as many armed struggle groups did who trained in the same Lebanese or Syrian camps as the European fascists and Nazis of that time?

## A necessary assessment

All the groups that tried urban guerrilla tactics in Western imperialist powers in the '60s and '70s failed. Not just because they misjudged the political and military capacities of the class enemy but because they thought the repression of the State apparatus would magically push the masses into rebellion. In Italy and France, among the leaders and militants who have written testimonies about their 'guerillist' activities, very few, to my knowledge, have undertaken a detailed critical assessment of what went wrong 30 years ago. Some books can be useful for such a task: Renato Curcio (*A viso aperto*), Anna Laura Braghetti (*The Prisoner, 55 Days With Aldo Moro*), Valerio Morucci (*La Peggio Gioventu*), Vincenzo Guagliardo (*Di Sconfita in Sconfita*) and Alberto Franceschini (*Che Cosa Sono le BR. Le Radici, la Nascita, la Storia, il Presente*) – all five members of the Italian Red Brigades but at different stages and levels of responsibility; Hans Joachim Klein who 'worked' with Carlos (*The German Guerrilla: Terror, Reaction and Resistance*); and Sergio Segio Miccia Corta, from Prima Linea. There is also a very interesting documentary *Do You Remember Revolution?* by Loredana Bianconi: she interviews women who describe their commitment inside the far left terrorist groups, with an important reflection about why and how they took the decision to

tains or isolated forests. Apart from the noticeable exception of Italy (where 30,000 people were imprisoned for having facilitated or conducted 'terrorist acts') the European 'left terrorist' groups' membership never exceeded 100-200 people and never enjoyed mass support. They built small clandestine structures which had serious logistical problems: finding the money to live a clandestine life, buying weapons, training to acquire military experience, etc. And their survival problems had an overwhelming influence on the poverty of their political line. As most were not linked to any mass party (with the exception of ETA and IRA, who had a significant legal front with a radical bourgeois-democratic line), they were trapped: either having to rob banks or kidnap rich people (and the organisation could be quickly transformed into an apolitical criminal group or dominated by its military leadership) or establish close financial and political links with Russian imperialism until the late '80s, or, since then, with 'Rogue States' or jihadist-terrorist groups whose assistance has never rivalled that furnished by Russian imperialism. Some co-operated with the secret services of the state capitalist bloc, some worked as mercenaries for Middle Eastern States. The co-operation with the Libyan, Yemeni or Syrian States was in a way quite 'normal': if you were looking for a country where you could train for guerrilla combat and where you could freely buy sophisticated weapons, you ended up co-operating with bloody dictatorial regimes and, at worst, working as mercenaries for foreign secret services.

The fact that the interviewees compare their own situation to that of 'rogue States' illustrates the limits of their political understanding ('Within the metropolis we are the equivalent of the rogue States', says J.B.). To crush the Muslim Brothers the Syrian government bombed and killed at least 10,000 civilians in the town of Hama in 1982. Saddam Hussein used toxic gas in 1988, killing 5,000 Kurds and probably killing another 100,000 Kurds in other massacres; during the early '90s his

exaggerating a bit, they are lying, hoping that the emotional side of their analysis (the oppressed have been rioting and they are victims of racism and police brutality, and the radical left condemned them because it is racist, etc.) will prevail over the rational side.

The police forces own 1,996 vehicles used for 'maintaining law and order', 15,454 'light vehicles' (cars and estate cars) and 3,897 'service vehicles' (lorries and vans, one presumes). So a total of 21,348 vehicles. *Cette Semaine* has suggested that on a national scale not more than 90 private vehicles were destroyed every day.[6] As the riots lasted 18 days, that would be 1,620 private cars. Estimating very high, and even if one generously adds to this figure the 140 buses and 100 post office vehicles which were either burned or damaged, we come to around 1,860 vehicles. So the total number of private vehicles burnt was  $9,500 - 1,860 = 7,640$  vehicles. If *Cette Semaine* was right (and Quadrelli and his informers' analysis is very close to theirs), that would mean that not only most of the 1,996 police vehicles used for 'maintaining law and order' would have been destroyed but also a significant fraction of those used for routine missions or service use.

How could the Minister of the Interior, the various police trade unions and the whole media succeed in hiding the fact that between a quarter and one third of the total pool of police vehicles had been destroyed without a trace? That would have meant concealing thousands of bills, obliging all policemen and even auto-repair workers to stay silent, and hiding a huge increase in the police budget. And even if one subtracts from these 7,640 vehicles, say 2,000 vehicles belonging to scumbag bosses, and foremen and fascists' cars miraculously destroyed by Quadrelli's guerrillaist friends or other 'rioters', how could the disappearance of 5,000 police vehicles be hidden for such a long time? Since cops generally 'work' inside or close to their vehicles, how many would have been badly or fatally injured if thousands of police cars had been burnt? Alliance, the right-

wing police trade union of which 36 percent of police are members, asked and got a special 'riot bonus' for the cops. Can one imagine they would have remained silent had hundreds of their colleagues been seriously wounded during the riots? The number of wounded cops doubled in the 10 years up to 2005 (roughly from 2,200 to 4,400 per year), but has not seen a drastic increase in 2005 as a result of the riots (between 139 and 195 cops were wounded, the government statistics are incoherent). This basic data does not fit with Quadrelli's apocalyptic picture.

### 3. What is the importance of temp work and clandestine work?

It may be useful to give some precise data about precarity in France as M.B. seems to see temp work as playing a decisive economic role. In 2003, 86.9 percent of the wage earners had an unlimited contract (CDI) as opposed to 2.3 percent working for temp agencies, 8 percent with short-term contracts and 1.6 percent as apprentices. So the general picture does not correspond to the guerrilla's assertion, although it's obvious that temp work as well as unemployment exerts a strong pressure on the *garantiti* (those who have a supposedly guaranteed job: state employees and those with unlimited contracts in the private sector). And even if these statistics don't include 'clandestine labour', this represents only a few hundred thousand people, as the government estimates there are 400,000 'illegals', including unemployed and minors. What M.B. says applies more to the youth section of wage earners, 15-29 years old: 6.1 percent work for temp agencies, 18 percent are on short term contracts, 6.7 percent are apprentices and 68.5 percent are on unlimited contracts (CDI). And this youth section of wage earners is certainly more important in the poorest areas of the working class suburbs than in other areas of the territory.

Traditionally, nationalist groups practice compulsory or 'voluntary' racketeering, extorting industrialists, shopkeepers and even ordinary workers, but this does not prevent them from also robbing banks to get financial resources. In so doing, they already act as an embryo of the future ax-collecting State. Their aim of securing an alliance of all classes to build a new nation means that they never support workers' strikes and struggles.

The armed movements who had a programme referring to socialism and saw the situation as pre-revolutionary in the '60s and '70s (the Weathermen, Red Brigades, Red Army Faction, Action Directe) were not fighting against a foreign imperialist occupying force, even if they often targeted American military bases and officers or NATO buildings in Europe. They were supposedly fighting against their own bourgeoisie and for socialism. The repression which struck them was so violent that in the case of the RAF, for example, for over two decades the organisation spent almost all its energy trying to liberate those who had been arrested at the very beginning. A terrible example of the logic of asymmetric struggle between an armed grouplet and a sophisticated bourgeois State. On the ideological level, they were torn between the disastrous Stalinist model of 'socialism' and the confused spontaneist mood of the '60s and '70s, and they did not bring anything new to a revolutionary understanding of modern capitalism.

Other groups such as the Italian Prima Linea refused to adopt a clandestine structure which would totally cut them off from society and the working class. They claimed to be at the service of the social movements ('on the front line', although ready to retreat if necessary) and played with fire until almost 1,000 militants were arrested, later collectively deciding to renounce the armed struggle.

In the imperialist West, none of these movements succeeded in liberating any part of the territory, creating liberated areas or even small *focos*, because they were acting in predominantly urban countries with no possibility of hiding in remote moun-

In Latin America, when most of the local dictatorships disappeared, small guerrillaist groups and the few individuals who managed to survive the repression of the '60s and '70s generally used the facilities of bourgeois democracy. That's probably why many former guerrilleros are today in Green or social-democratic parties, or in NGOs fighting for human rights.[10] They were not obliged to take stock of their failure to provoke a socialist revolution based on urban or rural guerrilla tactics, because they won a certain national legitimacy as courageous fighters against corrupt and dictatorial regimes, as 'anti-imperialist' fighters, and as the forerunners of the present 'democratic' regimes. This is the case for those who abandoned the guerrilla struggle for legal political action in countries like Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, Venezuela and even Colombia.

### **Armed struggle in the west: a total failure**

In the West, there were two kinds of armed struggle groups: those who had a predominantly nationalist agenda and those who had a very confused 'socialist' programme. Both tragically failed.

The IRA struggle in Northern Ireland ended up in a complete failure, although admittedly it was facing the British army. The IRA has been transformed from a petit-bourgeois republican movement to a reactionary bourgeois party. ETA's military fight inside the Basque Country had a glorious period during the Franco dictatorship, but after bourgeois democracy was restored in Spain, it has known numerous splits and has not won any significant victories; based on a reactionary programme, it has recently murdered several journalists, intellectuals and former militants who did not share its views;[11] as regards Corsican nationalists, some of them use disgusting racist, anti-migrant rhetoric, and none have any political future given the present economic structure of the island.

### **4. Quadrelli reinvents the wheel**

According to Quadrelli: 'What happened last autumn in the French peripheries was quickly dismissed as an apolitical event' and 'The organisation of work, model of social government and army were the targets of the revolt.' Everyone remembers the article written by the historian Françoise Blum on 10 November 2005 in the daily *Le Monde*, an article which has been quoted and reproduced in several books and many times on the internet. Since November 2005 all the many books of essays and conferences organised by social scientists have stressed the political dimension of the riots. Obviously, they do not share Quadrelli's specific point of view based on the testimony of his guerrilla friends. Nevertheless, they do not ignore the political dimension of the 'rioters'' actions. Many of these reformist left writers emphasise that suburban youth believe in the Republican 'egalitarian' message. They argue that if the 'rioters' were burning the symbols of the State or attacking its representatives, it was because they wanted the Republican State to play its 'egalitarian and democratic' role, and not because they wanted to overthrow or destroy it, as Quadrelli's interviewees believe. The social scientists wrote that although there were no traditional forms of organisation with leaflets, leaders and committees, the rioters' demands were implicit in the targets they chose. And the fact that many rioters were showing their French IDs to the media was interpreted by these left-wing intellectuals as a sign that the rioters had some form of typical French Republican political consciousness: they wanted to be respected as 'citizens' with all due rights.

In a way that was confirmed by the huge rise in voter participation during the subsequent presidential elections and the majority vote for the Socialist Party candidate, Ségolène Royal, in the working class suburbs. Likewise, by the small but real manifestations of anger and disappointment from a minority of youth on the night following the second round of the presiden-

tial elections and during the following week. Obviously there are many criticisms to be made of this *citoyennist* ideology (see [http://www.mondialisme.org/article.php3?id\\_article=386](http://www.mondialisme.org/article.php3?id_article=386)) and to this explanation of November 2005, but one can't just act as if it did not exist, as Quadrelli does in his article. Among many other texts, it is sufficient to read Marwan Mohammed's article 'Les voies de la colère: "violences urbaines" ou révolte d'ordre "politique"?' [<http://socio-logos.revues.org/document352.html>] to see that Quadrelli exaggerates the originality of his own thesis.

### 5. May '68 general strike a joke?

... in comparison, May '68 will look like so much mischief dreamed up by over-exuberant students. For more than 20 days, no French periphery sleeps tranquilly

writes Quadrelli who seems to imply that the 'riots' were more politically and socially important than May '68. Such an absurd assertion is, in a way, necessary for Quadrelli as he wants to reject the 'old' notion of the class struggle and to replace it with a more trendy version of social conflicts: a mixture of Toni Negri's Multitude theory with the nationalist and racialised vision of the revolt of the 'post-colonised' minorities inside 'White' Western societies, as defended in France by the Indigènes de la République (Natives of the Republic) movement. And this ideological soup is spiced up by his interviewees' uncritical allusions to third world guerrillas, and Quadrelli's own references to Michel Foucault. May '68 involved 10 million strikers even if a good part of them stayed at home and were not very active politically (i.e. occupying the factories as in June 1936, going to demonstrations, participating in local action committees, etc.). November 2005 mobilised around 15,000 rioters. 4,700 people, authentic rioters or not, were arrested, half of them after the riots, and apparently very few women

## Latin America: From urban guerrilla to democratic reformism

In Latin America, Cuba and Nicaragua have been the only two 'victorious' examples, but one must note they were facing regimes which were on the verge of collapsing, totally rotting from within. So what fuelled the energy of these armed movements and the support of the masses was not so much the liberation of the national territory from a foreign enemy, but the possibility of giving the final blow to a weak, long-term dictatorship. The Cuban 26th July Movement, which then fused with the Stalinist CP, imposed a ferocious one-party dictatorship on the Cuban working class. As regards the Sandinistas, they ended up as a corrupt Party which was obliged to abandon power without fundamentally changing society.

In the rest of Latin America, all the other experiences of armed struggle tragically failed. The Peruvian Sendero Luminoso became a sect of gangsters terrorising the oppressed. The small South American movements which used urban guerrilla tactics in countries like Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Chile were savagely crushed by the local dictatorships and did not have the time to even gain a mass base: the Chilean MIR regrouped 300 armed militants, the Argentinian ERP 500, the ELN (Che's guerrilla in Bolivia, based in the countryside): 47! Those who still have a certain military power today and control some parts of the country – the Colombian guerrillas (the FARC and the ELN) – have transformed themselves into racket industries closely linked to drug trafficking and which have no political future – if they ever had one. The only solution for their survival would be to integrate the repressive forces of the present bourgeois state, as has happened in some African countries, to bring at least a provisional end to their guerrilla activity.



they were building the leadership and apparatus of the future centralised bourgeois national State. These guerrillas combined predominantly countryside guerrilla actions (leading to the formation of traditional hierarchical armies) with urban guerrilla, generally at the final stage preceding the seizure of power. With the exception of the Taliban, they were generally supported (with ups and downs) by Russian imperialism in its global competition with American imperialism, and this support included money, weapons, military training, etc. The disappearance of the Soviet Union and of its grip on the Eastern Bloc colonies has weakened Russia so much that it can't play the same role any more on the global scale.

One must also add that at least in two cases (Algeria and Vietnam) the victory of the liberation movements was much more a political victory than a military one. In other words, it was because the French and American imperialist armies did not want to lose more soldiers, and because no strategic resources were at stake (at least at that stage), that they were willing to retire from the countries they were occupying. They were much more afraid of the immediate domestic political consequences of their actions, than of the national liberation movement's alleged military superiority. Both France and the United States had the military means (including the nuclear bomb) to crush their adversaries if they had wanted. As regards Cambodia, without the help of the Vietnamese armies and Chinese government, the Khmer Rouge would have probably remained an impotent grouplet lost in the jungle. And in Afghanistan, the troops of Russian imperialism had the military and technical superiority, but it was not enough to guarantee them the victory over the guerrilla.

among them. In November 2005 only 25 French *départements* out of 96 were touched by the 'riots'.

I understand that young radicals are today fed up with French May '68 mythology and want to win their own titles to glory. And they have all sorts of good reasons for being irritated (for further analysis see [http://www.mondialisme.org/article.php?id\\_article=739](http://www.mondialisme.org/article.php?id_article=739) and 740 'De May 1968 à Mars-Avril-Mai 2006'), but building new myths won't help change reality. As the comrades of Mouvement Communiste wrote: 'The repressive forces kept the military advantage. The demonstrators rapidly evaded direct fights with the police; they preferred to multiply isolated acts, led by reduced groups, against private and public targets. In parallel, the repressive forces have reduced to a minimum the occasions of direct and close contact to evade any 'bavure' ['unfortunate mistake' in police and military language, Y.C.] (...). They preferred to organise preventative and selective roundups before or after the riots.' [<http://www.mouvement-communiste.com/pdf/letter/LTMC0519EN.pdf>]

## 6. Fake and real dangers of fascism

According to Z.: we had to deal with some attempts by the fascists to build their own guerilla groups for counter-insurgency within the banlieue;

right-wing groups linked to Le Pen, which have a certain strength in the banlieue and can rely on support and a considerable amount of protection from the BAC [Brigades Anti-Criminalité]. The link between the BAC and the Nazi groups is very close, and in some ways they're the same thing;

militant forces (...) destroyed through a series of targeted actions all or at least many of the bases which the paramilitaries were preparing within the banlieues.

In one note Quadrelli adds: At Sens, for example, where the CRS [riot police] are based, the anthem adopted for recruits

was that of the SS Charlemagne Division, the French volunteers who fought alongside the Nazi army. To all this should be added the hegemony within the security forces of the extreme-right PPIP [sic!] union, which the magistracy was obliged to order be dissolved for its open incitement to racial hatred.

Unfortunately most of Quadrelli's information is, to my knowledge, wrong. There is no PPIP trade union. There is a FPIP far right trade union but it has not been banned. It was infiltrated by the National Front in the beginning of the 1990s which provoked a parliamentary enquiry available on the net. The FPIP has never been hegemonic on a national scale (see the statistics below), unless Quadrelli is referring to Sens alone? But Sens is not France, and the CRS are not based only in this town: there are 61 CRS divisions! As regards the 'Division Charlemagne' song, there is another version, which in a way is much worse and more plausible: if you compare the Division Charlemagne song with one of the CRS' songs there are several striking similarities. Maybe that's the origin of the story told to Quadrelli. But this has nothing to do with the fascist infiltration of the police force, and everything to do with traditional French nationalist ideology, which is another and much more dangerous story.

The fact that in some suburbs some fascist, Nazi or National Front people are, according to the guerrilla Z., infiltrating or cooperating with the BAC (Brigades Anti-Criminalité) can't be projected on a national scale, unless one gives serious proof. First, one must say that the truly fascist groups are very small in numbers. There are fascists inside the National Front but the party in itself is not a fascist party with paramilitary militias. In terms of recruiting thugs, Sarkozy's traditional and respectable UMP (Union pour un Mouvement Populaire) is certainly more able to do it quickly and efficiently than Le Pen. The National Front is a coalition of different heterogeneous far right factions including Catholic fundamentalists – and one must emphasise that the atheist-Nazi youth cadres split with Mégret and his

dictatorships (as well as against the influence of American imperialism), etc.

And there are probably many other models (or combined models) of armed struggles with very different political and social aims. That's why it's impossible to revere armed violence in an abstract way, as seems more and more trendy in some European radical circles. One has to study the specific political programme of each group, its internal organisation, its relationship with the masses and especially with the working class (when there is a significant one!) to decide if a guerrilla group has any interest for socialist revolution, or is just another faction of the future local ruling classes. And, contrary to what the guerrillas seem to think, decentralised guerrilla action or violence does not prevent it from playing into the hands of the class enemy.

## The conditions of success

The guerrilla struggle has generally been 'successful' in predominantly rural countries, occupied by foreign forces, where the tasks of the bourgeois revolution (liquidating feudalism, accomplishing agrarian reform, installing some kind of parliamentary democracy, imposing national unity, etc.) have not yet been fulfilled completely by a weak national rentier bourgeoisie unable to promote autonomous capitalist development and to fight the grip of Western imperialist powers. Such struggle was generally conceived and led by heavily centralised organisations, like the traditional Stalinist CPs (Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Yugoslavian) or by nationalist guerrilla movements (Algerian NLF, Cuban 26th July Movement, the Taliban) which copied the Stalinist example and sometimes used the mobilising power of Muslim religion (Algeria, Afghanistan). From the start, even if some of them had a pseudo-socialist rhetoric, all these movements made it clear

programme, to democratic forms of organisation by workers, farmers and the oppressed. If it is understood only as a military problem, then it reproduces traditional forms of bourgeois politics. And this can be verified in the experience of numerous guerrilla movements.

## Various models

Guerrilla warfare has corresponded in the past and corresponds today with very different situations:- a civil war between classes separated by opposing social interests, engaging millions of exploited;

- the armed self-defence of an ethnic minority in a imperialist State along a 'radical democratic' line;

- armed actions by people participating in social movements with a very confused 'communist' programme;

- urban left-wing terrorism by grouplets with an uncritical approach toward Stalinism, who made alliances with the Stalinist bloc, and whose main targets were related to the struggle against 'American imperialism' and totally disconnected from workers struggles;

- Western groups which transformed themselves into mercenaries for Palestinian liberation movements with the material help of Middle Eastern States;

- liberation movements of national minorities inside European imperialist metropolises promoting national unity of all classes including the patriotic bourgeoisie;

- national liberation struggles in the old colonial world where the local capitalism was very weak, where no bourgeois revolution had occurred, and which led to state capitalist regimes;

- groups who tried, after the success of the Cuban Revolution, either to apply its model (combining rural and urban guerrillas) and/or to struggle against South-American military

Mouvement National Républicain (MNR). If the National Front were to have any political future, it would probably imitate what Alleanza Nazionale did in Italy (splitting with the fascist MSI, Italian Social Movement), rather than building an extra-parliamentary 'fascist-revolutionary' force. Last but not least, the real danger in France is not so much the minute authentically fascist groups as the mass of repressive forces.

Quadrelli and Z. should know that for the last 50 years the role of the *polices parallèles* has been much more important than the role of fascist groups. These *police parallèles* recruit former members of the police and armed forces, 'freelance' people working for the secret services, mercenaries, thugs of the mob, etc. The cadres of the Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS), which was certainly the most dangerous reactionary force after the Second World War, were not mainly ex-fascists but former members of the Gaullist and even Socialist anti-Nazi Resistance...

The two trade unions which are close to the far right, the FPIP (Fédération Professionnelle Indépendante de la Police) and Action Police CFTC got respectively 4.73 percent and 1.4 percent of the votes at the last police trade union elections. Twelve years ago in 1995, the far right represented by the FPIP and the (subsequently banned) Front National Police won 13.24 percent of votes from 87,000 ordinary cops and their sergeants; and the far right won the majority among 2 of the 61 CRS brigades in 1995. Today, the UNSA Police (a trade union organising normal armed street cops and the CRS) receives 41 percent of the votes. And this trade union is close to... the Socialist Party, not to imaginary fascists! As regards Action Police CFTC, it was expelled from the national Christian trade union and does not exist any more. Only 150 members were paying dues to this group despite its claim to have 20,000 sympathisers.

## 7. ‘Thousands deported’ – or three?

‘In reality, rather than arresting the guilty they got thousands of people deported’, declares J.B.

100 foreigners were arrested, 10 expulsion procedures were launched and THREE were finally deported. Most of the 4,500 ‘rioters’ arrested had a French ID even if their parents were African or North Africans. From the few studies which were made after the arrests, one can quote the data for the département of Yvelines: 36 percent were Franco-French, 35 percent French-North Africans and 29 percent French-Africans. So although Sarkozy announced he would deport foreigners who had been arrested, he did not find many to deport (three, not thousands!) and he discovered he did not have the legal means to do it. While one has to treat State statistics with much distrust, the Renseignements Généraux estimated that among the 436 ‘riot leaders’ they identified, 87 percent were of French nationality. And among these, 67 percent had North African parents, 17 percent African parents and 9 percent Franco-French parents.

## 8. The media image of the banlieusard is more complex

For a time ‘The banlieusard who could exemplify the whole banlieue became a kind of cult object’, declares G.Z.

His critique of the manipulation of individuals ‘from immigrant backgrounds’ is quite good. But G.Z. then pretends that today we are in the reverse situation:

the banlieuesard is no longer the personification of the people, today the myth is of the thug, the accursed, the invisible, the pre-modern, the pre-social, the marginalised, the pre-global or I don’t now what else.

G.Z. probably does not watch TV often, which is the main means of political brainwashing today. If he did it on a regular basis, he would discover that the State channels and even

# PART THREE – SOME HYPOTHESES ABOUT ARMED STRUGGLE AND GUERRILLA WARFARE

In their enthusiastic (and unfortunately blind) support for ‘revolutionary’ violence, Quadrelli and his guerrillaist friends mix up, in the most confused ways, various social and political phenomena. They are disgusted, in a very general sense, by capitalist exploitation, but also by racism, sexism and all forms of domination, and this disgust is obviously something we share. But the guerrillas also seem fascinated by violence in a very basic and crude way. As if the most important thing was to show one has ‘balls’ and to uphold the cult of all the courageous people who had the ‘balls’ to confront their oppressors. This abstract fascination with violence goes together with two lethal flaws:

- blind faith in the pseudo-socialist rhetoric of many third-worldist or nationalist currents (from Lumumba to the Vietnamese and Algerian guerrilla fighters);

- the naive implicit assumption that when the oppressed take up arms they are automatically fighting for the right cause.

If one studies what is happening today in Palestine between Hamas and the PLO or in Iraq between the different factions who want to defeat and expel the American occupation forces, one understands that armed violence in itself is not socialist, or even progressive. It has to be linked to a detailed socialist

youth who, sincerely believing the Social Revolution will happen in the very near future, are ready to go to jail or even risk their lives for it.

As regards countries where cops shoot on demonstrators (South America or Africa, for example), confrontations between rioters and cops have never led to a growing armed resistance movement, so far at least. In Venezuela, the Caracazo (five days of riots in February 1989) led to the first failed Chavez military putsch in 1992 but not to the development of any mass urban guerrilla, or to any civil war. The latest three month long general strike in Guinea in 2006, an authentic mass movement, did not lead to the formation of any mass urban guerrilla movement either. Those who promote urban guerrilla tactics in Western imperialist nations generally ignore the role of the professional armed forces and only focus on the police. This is a huge political mistake, particularly in a country like France with at least 433,000 armed men from a population of 67 million. One does not confront tanks, bombers and warships armed only with Kalachnikovs and hand grenades brought through networks controlled by organised crime or jihadist-terrorist groups. If one wants to talk about armed insurrection in Western imperialist countries one has to go much further than beating up 3 cops in an isolated street, or throwing a few Molotov cocktails at police cars or a few stones at a deserted police building then running away.

the main political parties are trying to do exactly the opposite, at least on a local scale. They present small successful businesses, local community groups who are doing their best, heroic French-Africans or French-North Africans who are considered exemplary by their neighbours, etc.

## 9. The imaginary homogeneity of the banlieues

Quadrelli misrepresents the 'banlieues' and 'banlieusards' as socially or 'racially' homogeneous. This assertion is not made in these terms by Quadrelli and his guerrillas but the idea is implicit in the title of the article, in the interviews, and also in Quadrelli's use of such expressions as the 'women of the banlieues', the 'inhabitants of the banlieues', 'black areas', etc., and it pervades the argument behind these phrases. The suburbs have grown up outside the biggest French towns. They cover 7 percent of the national territory and have 21 million inhabitants, one third of the total population. Among these 21 million people, 4.5 million people live in a very precarious situation (earning less than 640 euros a month). If one wants to draw an oversimplified picture, the 'banlieues' can be divided into 2 categories: those with houses and those living on council estates (buildings financed by the State or the commune [municipal authority] provide 4 million rented dwellings). But in reality the situation is much more complex: new towns ('*villes nouvelles*', generally welcoming professionals, waged petty bourgeois and qualified workers); old decaying industrial zones; new high tech or office areas, etc., are also located in the 'banlieues'. Some of the 'banlieues' are exclusively bourgeois (i.e. very rich people), some host every strata of the 'middle classes', some mix part of the middle class and part of the working class. Inside the predominantly working class suburbs (more or less those which include the areas labelled as ZUS[7] and in which 4.5 million people reside) you have other complex social mixtures within the same limited territory: small working class

houses; small council estate buildings for white collar workers or teachers; old decaying tower blocks 'welcoming' recent migrants; more recent tower blocks for those with stable jobs ('White' or 'non-White', blue or white collar workers). That's why a riot can occur 500 meters from an area with houses. Or 1 km from a well-maintained council maintained high-rise or tower block.

As we said above, if one takes urban guerrilla theory on its own terms we read that it's important for the guerrilla to study and thoroughly understand the territory in which he (or she) is operating. But a detailed analysis of the territory of the French suburbs is missing in Quadrelli's article, in his references, notes and interviews.

## 10. Does control by 'the Mob' explain the unequal distribution of the riots?

According to Quadrelli:

Not insignificant in this respect is this relative climate of social peace experienced during the revolt in Marseilles, the French city where organised crime seems to have considerable power.

In other words Marseilles did not move because it's controlled by the Mob. The author should have looked at a map of the town, contacted some local militants and inquired about the location of the popular and working class districts. If he had done some research, he would have found that:

jobs in the sector of urban associations (people who are in charge of sports, leisure, cultural activities for the youth, etc. and who are payed by the municipality and/or the State) in Marseilles have grown by 661 percent in less than twenty years [...];

The people doing these jobs are predominantly 17- to 25-year-olds, and: enterprise zones close to the council estates of the 15th and 16th *arrondissements* have, since 1997, attracted

- helicopters transporting troops able to land on the top of buildings.

- drones with infrared cameras.

This list indicates how irresponsible those who push suburban youth to physically confront police forces are, to confront without any preparation, political organisation and political programme and in the absence of a civil war. Our class enemy has plenty of time and means to counter urban guerrilla tactics, and a revolutionary strategy should take these capacities into account.

4. It is based on a simplistic idea: repression will get tougher and tougher, police forces will kill one or several people, and then there will be a big, more or less spontaneous, mass revolt. In Western 'democratic' states (at least in Western Europe since the Second World War, the United States is a different story), police forces do not usually use their guns against demonstrators. When they kill people in demos it is with sticks, so called defensive weapons like the flashball or taser, very rarely with bullets. The repressive techniques conceived to control street actions grow more and more inventive (for example, during the anti-CPE demos they used paint balls as a way to catch 'rioters' at a later stage), and this permanent reinforcement does not correspond to a parallel growth of the number of rioters confronting them.

## An asymmetric conflict

Urban guerrilla tactics would only have a meaning if part of a more general plan to train rioters for a military confrontation with the State in the context of a civil war. But where is there a civil war going on in Western Europe? If one defends this idea, one must be able to foresee and explain what the next steps will be. If not, one is just playing with words in the virtual world of the Internet, or playing with the lives of the few revolutionary

2. It deepens the division within mass actions between those who are ready to physically confront the police forces and those who are not yet ready. During the CPE you could have 300,000 people demonstrating in the streets of Paris and only 1,000 youth ready to 'fight', who were obviously an easy target for the cops);

3. It enables the State to invent new tactics both to spot 'violent' elements and to arrest them without touching the crowd. We saw these tactics in action during the CPE struggle when the cops in uniform were instructed to be very 'patient' until the end of the demos. The State sent in hundreds of civilian cops acting in small groups, took thousands of photos and filmed those wearing masks, organised the arrest of small youth groups with the cooperation of uniformed cops distributed across the parallel streets, etc. Another example: the systematic use of helicopters during the November 2005 'riots' in order to coordinate the repression between the various police forces.

C.E.S. Talarico, Squadron Leader in the French Army, describes how some tactics used by the November rioters are close to those promoted by Carlos Marighella in his *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*: small mobile groups organising ambushes, using cell phones, etc.[9] This was already discussed in the press during the riots, especially the events in Grigny. What is interesting is the strategy he outlines for dealing with the next, potentially larger spate of riots, which Talarico foresees as being lead by a revolutionary or an 'Islamist' group (sic!):

- cut off the relays used for mobile phones and blur VHF communications.
- equip policemen on the ground with night-vision goggles.
- helicopters with night-vision binoculars, thermal cameras, GPS and mapping systems, etc., to spot people on rooftops and mobile groups of rioters.
- helicopters transporting elite snipers.

10,600 jobs. More than 33 percent of wage earners have been hired in the closest areas'

– Michel Samson, *Le Monde*, 14 December 2005

These two factors (the importance and nature of the municipal network and of the local associations financed by the municipality or the State) in Marseilles as compared with the ones existing in the Paris suburbs, and the hiring of a significant number of youth in the enterprise zones, do not explain everything, and one can propose other hypotheses. Generally, the suburbs which 'enjoy' more or less decent access to a big town centre (fairly frequent buses, trains or tramways) 'rioted' much less than the ones which include the most isolated districts made up of council estates: Clichy-sous-Bois (where the November riots started) is a perfect example of this spatial and social segregation. A rather old but significant statistic illustrates this idea: in 1990, among the 500 most 'difficult' districts (there are now 718 in Metropolitan France), 13 percent were crossed and 32 percent bordered by a motorway, 83 percent bordered by an express road, 70 percent near railways and only 40 percent near a railway station. So the fact that of the 6 million people living in very precarious circumstances, 1.5 million live in town centres and NOT in suburbs explains why Marseilles, like other towns with dense working class districts inside their boundaries or even near the town centre, saw fewer riots than other towns, not the overwhelming power of the local Mob!

There is an additional reason for the unequal intensity of the riots: sometimes the difference between 'rank and file mobsters' and 'normal' workers is quite thin: low-paid workers (for example those who steal commodities in the logistics sector and resell them to increase their wages) can at the same time be workers and small-time dealers. One can also note that suburbs like Mantes-la-Jolie (birthplace of the 1991 riots) and Vaulx-en-Velin (which experienced important local riots in 1979 and 1990) saw scant participation in the riots of November 2005. To

explain the unequal distribution of the riots on a national scale requires more reflection and solid enquiry rather than rolling out ready-made assumptions.

Finally, there is no direct connection between extremely bad housing conditions and 'riots': among the 900,000 people who suffer the worst 'housing' conditions (146,000 people live in mobile homes, 200,000 live on the streets and sometimes sleep in night shelters, 550,000 live in cheap hotels or lousy rented rooms), the huge majority do not live near the council estates of the suburbs which rioted.

## 11. The left and suburban youth

According to M.B., the left-wing movements (...) don't want to be contaminated by the young banlieuesards, they do everything to keep them out, and in some cases have worked together with the police to keep them from acting in the centre of Paris.

And M.T. declares: 'The banlieuesards attacked the university students, beat them up and robbed them.' M.B., M.T. and probably Quadrelli himself are mixing many different facts, time periods and questions. First of all, they are confusing what happened in November 2005 during which there was no conflict between rioters and students, with what happened between March and May 2006, and only in Paris. During the anti-CPE movement, tens of thousands of 'banlieue' high school and university students demonstrated INSIDE the ranks of the mass demos in 2006. A few hundred guys, generally teenagers, 'played' OUTSIDE the demos. They were organised in groups numbering from 8-12 to 30 persons (according to the figures observed in four Parisian demos). The 'game' was to spot an isolated individual (generally a teenage girl, or a weak guy with glasses ON THE EDGE of the mass demonstrations. If this teenager had a mobile, a camera or a nice jacket, they would throw him or her on the pavement, steal his property

Apparently, Quadrelli and his interviewees never asked themselves this kind of question. They have a simplistic approach toward urban guerrilla: they put all cops and military in the same basket, treat them all as enemies to be beaten up and, tomorrow, killed. This approach is suicidal and does not even take into account the tactics of the icons of guerrilla warfare praised by the 'Black' guerrillas. All victorious national liberation movements infiltrated the police forces and armies and directed specific propaganda towards them, not only based on killing their members or calling on them to quit the police or armed forces.

Even on a microscopic scale, as in this contemporary instance, the urban guerrilla strategy helps the democratic bourgeois state to play its so called 'protective' role. For the mass of the working class population there is no obvious link between the fight against the permanent aggressivity and racism of many policemen and setting fire to buses (which are already rarely seen in their isolated suburbs), daycare centres (which enable women to earn tiny wages and survive), schools (which are the only way for their children to get a better job than their parents), and local post offices. That does not mean that the mass of the banlieues' inhabitants did not understand the actions of the youth (their own children or their neighbour's children), but there is a difference between understanding, approving, actively supporting and participating. Quadrelli and his guerrillas blur all these nuances in their analysis, in a purely artificial and demagogic way.

In the present situation, urban guerrillaism has other serious drawbacks:

1. It helps to reinforce the repressive ideology popular with a large section of the working class (Franco-French or not), as has been shown by the recent victory of president Sarkozy, former Minister of the Interior, and even the following smaller victory of the right in the Parliamentary elections in June 2007;



cilitates brainwashing and reactionary ideas. Basically they recruit people with little school education. And people who know (even if they first chose this line of 'work' because they had no other job perspective) what kind of dirty job they will have to do: fight demonstrators and rioters. The CRS also recruit local cops who want more 'action'. Some of them have other functions (looking after the beaches so that nobody drowns in the sea, saving mountain climbers stuck in a difficult situation, watching the traffic on motorways, sitting for hours in their vans near official buildings, etc.) which is the 'social' face of their repressive activity.

Besides these two main police forces, one has to mention the municipal police forces, although they are not always allowed to wear weapons. Since 1983, they have grown from 5,000 to 19,000 cops, but, if we're talking about serious repression, there is a much more important body which depends on the armed forces:

iii) The 'Gendarmerie Nationale'

Active across the whole territory but only in towns of less than 20,000 inhabitants and in the countryside, the 90,000 'gendarmes' live either in barracks or in flats, and are very powerful because they have administrative, judicial and military powers. Among them, one must mention the dangerous and well trained '*gendarmes mobiles*' (17,000): a tough military force used against demonstrations and even in conflicts in other countries (Lebanon, Kosovo, Ivory Coast, etc.). And to these armed repressive forces (183,000 people), one should add the French Armed forces consisting of around 250,000 professional soldiers. So a total of 423,000 people who have all sorts of weapons, armoured vehicles, planes and boats to crush any insurrection. **A simplistic conception of the urban guerrilla**

Only if one takes into account the different aims, functions and social recruitment practices of the various police and military forces can one begin thinking about an efficient political strategy to counter and defeat them.

very quickly, often beat him or her very savagely for the fun of it, and then run away. The age of the guys involved in these actions was between 14-18, with sometimes some older leaders up to 25 years of age. They NEVER confronted the demonstrators, except on 23 March 2006 at Place des Invalides where, at the end of the demo, some groups of anarcho-syndicalist sympathisers (redskins) finally decided to react against these acts of aggression toward isolated individuals, but obviously they did not deliver them to the cops. One of the reasons why 'revolutionary' groups hesitated to intervene against the aggressors was the fact that the latter were predominantly 'Black', according to Quadrelli's categories, and they feared of being labelled as racists if they retaliated against them.

It happened several times that members of the cops' trade unions or stewards of the other unions (CGT, FO, etc.) intervened against groups of (or even individual) suburban youths, on the basis of their '*capuche*' (hoodies), trainers, baggy trousers (the banlieues uniform) and/or their skin colour or physical appearance (i.e. if they 'looked Arab' or Black!). After having searched them they handed them over to the cops if they found any kind of 'weapon'. In such a situation, it was difficult to make out the difference between the traditional anti-leftist attitude of Stalinist trade unionists, a political desire to cooperate with the cops, and Franco-French working class racism against French-African suburban youth. The trade unions publicly acknowledged their interventions, if only as 'preventative' actions, just as the cops did, who several times prevented groups of Franco-African youth from taking public transport into Paris, although this had no significant effect, given the mobility and organisation of the small groups attacking isolated people at the edges of the demonstrations. So, in the above quotation from the testimonies of M.T. and M.B., the words 'left-wing', 'banlieusards' and 'students' are rather misleading.

## 12. Banlieusards versus students?

During the anti-CPE struggle the 'banlieusards' were opposed to the university students, claims M.B.: The youth of the left movements are mostly students, whereas the others are workers, thieves, robbers, and, as there's no reason to hide it, also small-scale drug dealers.

Mixing up the general question of the social composition of far left youth with the specific problems encountered during the anti-CPE movement does not help one understand anything, including the November 'riots' several months previously. The social composition of university students today is very different from in the 1960s. Half of the students work in part-time jobs, with short-term contracts, etc. In universities located in the suburbs there is a higher proportion of blue and white collar workers' children than in central Paris. On the national scale, white and blue collar workers represent 60 percent of the active population and their children represent only 22 percent of university students, a significant minority. After 4 years of university this percentage drops to 12 percent and diminishes even further among those struggling to get a PhD. So the picture is much more complex than the one presented by Quadrelli.

What is true is that there is an obvious difference, irrespective of national origins and skin colour, between those who stopped studying at 16, who are unemployed (with or without a high school or university diploma), and those who are still studying in secondary schools or university. Their daily realities and expectations are very different, even if, in the working class, you can find representatives of all three groups in the same family unit. The classic example being the successful sister and the unemployed or unqualified brother. But to present these contradictions as a class opposition between the 'Black' suburban poor and the 'White' middle class Parisian students is both factually wrong and politically absurd. As regards the pre-

they 'work'. These police forces have recruited French West Indians but few French-Africans and French-North Africans (actually the professional armed forces have made some advances in this process, at least in the lowest ranks). But in the most isolated working class council estates, the DSCP cops (those who are idealised as the 'proximity police') are most of the time physically absent (not more than 4,000 in the whole of France). This is why the reformist left and some associations are asking for more local policemen. This position is very dangerous but its critique can be fully understood only if the inhabitants are self-organised and strong enough to solve most security problems themselves: 80 percent of cops' interventions are linked to problems between neighbours or within families, so these problems could be dealt with by people not linked with the police such as committees of neighbours and social workers, psychologists, etc. This is far from being an immediate possibility, particularly in areas where there is active drug trafficking or where youth gangs are well organised. And this may explain why the 'security projects' put forward by the left and the right are in fact popular among a large part of the working class ('White' or not). In other words, many workers hate bad racist cops but are not hostile to 'good republican police'.

ii) The CRS, Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (15,000)

This force was created in December 1944 by the De Gaulle government. In 1948, during the miners strike and during all the conflicts of the following years, the CRS were called upon systematically. Traditionally they have also been used against farmers, shopkeepers or truck driver demonstrations.[8] Today, they often provoke and harass French-African and French-North African youth at the entrances to big council estates, in railway stations, etc. Organised into 61 companies grouped in 10 regional units, they are spread over the whole national territory. They spend most of their time moving up and down the country and, as a result of this permanent mobility, have no stable links with local populations. This way of living obviously fa-

## PART TWO – FORCES OF REPRESSION AND URBAN GUERRILLAS

### Hating cops... and then what?

Hating cops does not solve the political problem of winning their support or, at least, their neutrality. All successful social and national revolutions have seen a split inside the repressive forces (police, army, secret services and political police). Often the dividing line has been the difference between the professional and non-professional forces. Therefore we must study very closely any dissent that may appear and be watchful that it does not help fascist grouplets or parties to grow. Fuelling the hate of the youth against the police forces does not lead anywhere politically. If we want such a discussion to take a more concrete turn, then we must know exactly who our enemies are and what are their material means. In France there are three main different kinds of law enforcement forces:

i) The ‘peace keepers’(!), *gardiens de la paix*, of the DSCP

They ensure ‘public security’ on a local basis (around 78,000 including 6,700 officers) and are part of the DSCP, *Direction Centrale de la Sécurité Publique*. The BAC (Brigades Anti-Criminalité) belong to this category of armed cops active in the streets: their members are particularly motivated because they need to serve for three years, then pass a series of physical tests, and even undergo an interview by a psychologist before they can join! DSCP cops may or may not live in the area

dominantly ‘middle class’ character of the ‘Left youth’, there is a bit more truth to the argument, but that would need more evidence and discussion. Especially when those who utter these definitive judgements often come from the very same middle class milieu...

### 13. The French school system and social selection

‘The banlieuesards pose a problem exactly opposed to that of the middle class youth’, claims M.T.

It all depends what one calls ‘middle class’ and whether one includes white collar workers in the middle classes or not; whether one considers teachers, qualified engineers and social workers as middle class, etc., and what one calls ‘high schools’. If one looks at the technical high schools, M.T.’s assertion is not accurate. And if one takes into account the fact that, among the 500,000 candidates who passed the *baccalauréat* (final diploma at the end of the high school) last year, 35 percent were working class children (i.e. blue and white collar workers, for the statisticians), M.T.’s assertion is not accurate either.

Obviously, the process of social selection inside the school system is pitiless but, if one compares how it has evolved since the ‘60s, it today attains its full speed and ‘efficiency’ at a later age. In the 1960s, social selection started at 11 years old (90 percent of pupils were directed toward a technical or manual work curriculum), today it starts at 16 or even at 18 after the *baccalauréat*. Because this process of selection is not as obvious as it was 40 years ago, it can fuel low self-esteem and deep individual frustration. At the same time, the school system (including university) remains the only way to climb up the social scale a little. To complete the picture, one must stress that 100,000 pupils leave the school system every year at the age of 16 without any diploma. Among these 100,000 teenagers, 30 percent are children of blue collar workers – another hidden form of social selection through the school system.

The children of the working class more often abandon their studies before the *'bac'*, take their final high school exam at a later age, and, even if they have the *'bac'*, are more hesitant to enter the university system than are the children of the middle classes. So today it is within the university system itself that social selection reaches its peak, even in the IUT (University Institutes of Technology) which offer two years of training (50 percent of working class children attend IUTs).

For all these reasons, it is absurd to oppose the *'banlieusards'* as a social-ethnic bloc to the *'students'*.

#### 14. Are students worse than cops?

*'For them [the banlieusards] the university and highschool students are even worse than the flics'*, declares M.T.

This is plain nonsense. Obviously I don't deny that some people may think this way. But to say that in working class families ALL the youth hate their neighbours or family members who study at school or university is absurd. And even more absurd when the person who defends this idea is herself a *'White'* member of the middle classes (a social worker) two good reasons to hate herself! To politically legitimate this form of thinking is just contributing to the spread of reactionary ideology. It involuntarily legitimates ruling class discourse: knowledge is not important for you, only an elite can succeed in studying and understanding the world, so just accept life as a wage slave. And M.T. goes as far as to say that the *'banlieusards'* in a sense feel more empathy with the cops who do the dirty work, than with students who supposedly take advantage of the cops' existence. Once more, the fact that some proletarians may think this way is not new. Fascists have always been very good at fuelling anti-intellectual resentment and supporting the masculine *'vital energy'* of the people, as opposed to the lack of virility of *'intellectuals'*. But to see such bullshit quoted without criticism in a text written by a radical social scientist (who

French deserters and French supporters in France) has not been massively communicated to the younger generations, even in working-class suburbs.

## 18. The role of the Algerian war in the suburban subconscious

In a note Quadrelli underlines 'the strength of the presence of the Algerian war on an imaginary level in the 'French autumn'.

This sentence reflects the author's basic lack of information, who here copy-pastes the confused and contradictory ideas of the MIB [Mouvement de l'Immigration et des Banlieues who introduced the guerrillas to Quadrelli] and the Indigènes de la République movement. If one privileges this interpretation, one only confirms the 'ethnic' explanation of the riots put forward by the far right and, for a time, by part of the right. You cannot at the same time pretend that there were many 'bad Whites' among the rioters and proclaim that the Algerian War was central in their imagination. You cannot at the same time pretend that part of the immigrant population and their children are living under colonial domination in France, and pretend that the youth is well informed about the Algerian war. By what means are they informed – the school textbooks? But these are regularly denounced by the Indigènes de la République as colonialist! One last incoherence: 'Black' African and French-Africans kids don't have any relation to the Algerian War. So by what miracle could this war be an important part of their collective memory? There is nevertheless something we can retain from Quadrelli's remark, although it leads to a different conclusion. In the collective memory of the French ruling class, and especially among the cadres of the French Armed forces and the most sophisticated police officers, the concrete military experience of the Algerian war, both in Algeria and in France, has not been lost. And the lessons have been transmitted to the present agents of repression and their leaders. Unfortunately, on the side of the oppressed, I'm afraid the concrete experience of those who supported the Algerian NLF struggle (whether they were guerrillas in Algeria or

at the same time salutes intellectuals such as Foucault who always wrote books in the most elitist style) is pathetic.

## 15. Mythologisation of '68 student culture

According to the 'White' (Quadrelli thinks it's very important to mention her skin colour!) social worker M.T.: '68 has been dead and buried for a long time and there's no longer any common connection within the student world. There's no culture, political philosophy or ideology that brings students together: in practice they do no more than reproduce the social differentiations they are immersed in. If at a certain time being a student meant placing individuals within a suspended social zone where the fact of being students was a unifying factor, today and for a long time this is no longer true.

There is certainly a deep political gap between those who were active in the '80s and later and those who started being active in the 1950s and '60s. M.T.'s nostalgia for a common student culture with radical potential stems from a myth, or a gross lack of information. Until the Algerian war the French student trade union movement was politically very moderate and the UNEF (Union Nationale des Étudiants de France), which then fell into the hands of more radical people, was bravely cooperating in the reproduction of the system... as it did again later. The 'Marxist' rhetoric of left intellectuals in the 1960s, and of Maoist and Trotskyist groups, noisily dominated the left scene, especially in the universities, and later in the high schools. But there was no such thing as a mass radical student culture (such a phenomenon would pose a direct challenge to capital in all contemporary societies). At that time (shortly before '68 and in the succeeding decade), there was a dominant neutrality mixed with curiosity in the student milieu about anti-authoritarian or radical ideas, and the strong sympathy of a minority.

The present situation among the student youth is more diverse: there are far right grouplets as in the '60s, but there is

also a vast majority of moderate conservative right and left students. We had a good example of this moderate mood when, during the anti-CPE movement of 2006, the general assemblies, which rarely numbered more than 10-20 percent of the students, let the anti-strike students vote! These students want to get a job as soon as possible, because their parents have made big sacrifices to pay for their studies, a phenomenon that did not exist in the '60s (except for a minute number of students with grants) when the universities were overwhelmingly middle and upper class. 'Revolutionary' students are today an insignificant and unheard minority, except during student movements (that is almost every 2 years for the last 40 years).

It's rather funny that 21st century radicals mourn the bourgeois 'student culture' of the very elitist French student youth of the '60s. Two statistics illustrate this social reality: in 1968, France had 50 million inhabitants and 220,000 university students; today France has 67 million inhabitants and 2.5 million students.

## **16. The pseudo-concepts of the reactionary multiculturalist left**

The 'three colours Black-Blanc-Beur', writes Quadrelli.

'Beur' does not refer to the skin colour. 'Beur' is a kind of slang expression for Arab, and this word by extension can arbitrarily be attributed to anyone whose parents or grand parents come from North Africa or the Middle East. In other words, to a Turk, an Iranian, a Kurd, a Berber or... an Arab. And 'Arabs' are very far from considering themselves as 'Blacks', given the importance of the former Black African slave trade and anti-African racial prejudices in Arab-Muslim countries [In fact slavery goes on in Africa – but this is another subject]. The use of the English word 'Black' in French is very suspicious. Why has it become so trendy? Is it not because the 'White' multiculturalist left, while unable to overcome social definitions

based on skin colour, remain afraid to call the colour by its French name, 'Noir'? These pseudo-concepts ('Blacks, Blancs, Beurs') have been promoted by the anti-racist reformist left (SOS Racisme launched the slogan 'Blacks-Blancs-Beurs' with innumerable posters, badges, leaflets, mass concerts, etc., and the financial support of the Socialist Party then in power); by youth magazines, rap singers, pop radio and TV journalists, etc. Why should we use these concepts and give them any legitimacy in our critique of bourgeois society?

## **17. 2007 Elections and the banlieues**

Quadrelli writes: (...) as appears obvious even from superficial attention to the French presidential contest, the election will to a large extent be fought around the banlieue (...)

Nicolas Sarkozy for the right and Ségolène Royal for the left, regard the 'banlieue question' as the central node of their government projects, as can be seen from even a brief look at the media coverage of their pre-election programmes. If the right and the left certainly both made more efforts to gain votes in the working class areas than during the previous presidential elections (Sarkozy aimed to visit one factory per day!), the November riots and the (still deteriorating) situation of the suburbs were not evoked equally in right and left propaganda. There was an implicit agreement between the left and right wing parties not to throw oil on the fire, to evade the question of the riots, and to avoid visiting the poorest suburbs. The words most heard were 'pain', 'difficulties', 'small pensions', 'people who suffer', etc. Being good Christians, the three main candidates (Bayrou, Royal and Sarkozy) did not have any difficulty in using a very vague charitable language and never touching the burning social questions. If Bayrou and Royal personally went to 'difficult' suburbs, Sarkozy was not in a position to parade in the suburban streets and markets, as his rivals did.