

Rioting in France

YOUNG rioters in France were getting better organized yesterday as the national outburst of rage continued for an 11th day and expanded the length and breadth of the country. Police reported finding supplies of gasoline, empty bottles and face masks in an abandoned building at Evry, south of Paris. The government continued to promise firm law enforcement, but the French-born sons of Arab and African immigrant families continued to vent their rage, fire-bombing parked cars and a few buildings.

The riots reflect terrible relations between French police forces and non-white young males, who feel they are unfairly targeted by police in identity checks and weapon searches. They also reflect failure of France's official attempts to integrate non-white immigrants into the nation.

Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy fanned the flames early in the outbreak, which began Oct. 27, by denouncing the rioters as "scum." The remark seemed like an expression of anti-immigrant sentiment among the French, but it is now being flung back at the government by the rioters and their sympathizers.

A year ago, the French government started enforcing a newly tightened law forbidding the wearing of religious clothing in the public schools of France. The law, though cast in general terms, was aimed primarily at young Muslim women who wore their head scarves to school, in keeping with the social tradition of Islamic countries. The law enforced the prevailing French view that the public school should be a secular institution and not a place for religious expression. But to many Muslims in France, it felt more like an act of intolerance, imposing second-class status upon them.

The young people who have been rioting live, for the most part, in recently built suburbs of French cities, new towns of high-rise buildings planned especially for immigrant families, but which have turned into low-class ghettos characterized by high unemployment, drug dealing and gang warfare. Police visit these new towns quickly in squad cars but make little contact with the residents. Young males in the new towns who have spoken to journalists in recent days, between riots, said gangs in different housing projects used to fight each other. Now they have all turned their rage against Mr. Sarkozy, the police and the government.

Immigrant neighbourhoods, such as those in parts of central Winnipeg, can be useful when they help receive newcomers and offer a supportive environment while they find their bearings in an unfamiliar society. But the immigrant neighbourhoods of France have turned into something else: The paths toward integration have turned into dead ends that leave thousands of immigrant families on the outside of France's cities, looking resentfully in.

Canadian cities and provincial governments should make sure that churches, social agencies and volunteer organizations have all the support they need to put immigrant families in touch with the wider society and keep open the doors that can lead them to good jobs, pleasant neighbourhoods, good schools and bright prospects. France's social disaster could be Canada's.

A literate city

THE renovated public library, opening today, should help Winnipeg make the leap into the information age. Expanded space gives the librarians an opportunity to expand their service. New programs they have announced show that they have some bright new ideas for library service in an Internet environment. The city council and supporters of the library should encourage them to keep reaching further and higher to help Winnipeggers use the abundant information that floods into their lives.

The Millennium Library offers interactive programs such as Open Mic and Ad Lib where budding writers can hear the work of professionals and then present their own offerings to an audience. It offers help to people researching local history and to those tracing their own ancestors. These groups are devoted library users. The library is smart to cater to them. These programs and a few others are key means of bringing people in the door and persuading them to enjoy the library.

The essence of a library, however, is organized information. Any coffee house can, if it wants, pull together an audience to hear poets and writers try out their work. Only a library can offer a system for finding the document you need. Such systems were necessary in the days of books and periodicals, when the volume of published work grew far beyond what anyone could keep track of. They are still more necessary in the digital age when the volume of published material is so much greater.

But literacy in the digital age also includes skill in critical reading because the volume of published trash has grown in step with the volume of published treasure. The library should be helping its users become steadily more discerning, better able to wade through the trash and pick out the treasure.

A library can be a quiet place for reading. It can be a centre for study, creativity and entertainment. It can be a community recreation centre where people meet their friends to play cards. It can be a storehouse of printed matter. But it does not have to be any of these things. A library must be a place where librarians teach users the skills to find and use documents of all kinds. If the Millennium Library succeeds in that task, Winnipeg will prosper.



HAVE YOUR SAY

The Free Press welcomes letters from readers. They must include the author's name, address and telephone number. Letters may be edited. Letters to the Editor, 1355 Mountain Avenue, Winnipeg, R2X 3B6. Fax 697-7412. E-mail letters@freepress.mb.ca

LETTER OF THE DAY

Protect our trees

IT'S all about our historic trees, isn't it?

On one hand, I was glad to hear about a move to recommend a tree-protection bylaw for our city, yet on the other hand it makes me sad to think we will likely see it fade into the past without anything changing.

As a practising arborist, I understand the value and functions a tree provides, but also understand that development is necessary as our communities grow.

Our city is graced with many trees 100 years old and older. Currently, these trees can be chopped down without a second thought. In our travels, we encounter many homeowners who are surprised to know they have a tree on their property more than 125 years old.

Isn't it odd that a tree that pre-dates our city can be chopped down without notice, yet one has to apply for a permit to demolish an old garage.

We have to protect our historic trees!

GERRY ENGEL
Winnipeg



A common concern

THURSDAY evening I attended an extraordinary gathering where the congregation of Shaarey Zedek synagogue hosted representatives of the evangelical church community. The focus was Zionism and how both faith groups shared a common concern for the fate of Israel. With the state of Israel threatened with extermination by the president of Iran and anti-Semitism on the rise in Europe, the search for allies is understandable.

What makes this event rare and groundbreaking was its inter-faith nature, where 125 Christians, most of whom had never been in a synagogue before, were given a warm and hearty welcome.

Such bridge-building between faith communities fosters the communication and understanding that roots out prejudice. There could be benefit from more such gatherings.

With anti-Semitism on the rise in Canada and signs inside the doors of the synagogue warning us that we might have our bags checked, we came away with a fresh appreciation of the haunting fear that this scourge arouses in some of our neighbours in our very own city.

GORDON L. TOOMBS
Winnipeg

Autopac arithmetic

MY wife and I both drive 2001 model cars, same insurance coverage, same pleasure use and maximum discount. List price on my car is \$50,000, her's is \$22,000.

My Autopac premium is \$950, hers is \$1,100. When we question this seeming anomaly, we are told that the high incidence of thefts of her type of vehicle is a significant factor in her rate makeup.

Autopac is promoting the installation of immobilizers which, they claim, make cars

virtually theft proof. Yet, if we install one on her car her premium will be reduced by the "grand" sum of \$40 (about 3.5 per cent). Which still leaves her premium higher than mine.

Where is the logic or fairness? How can the theft risk be such a significant factor when charging a premium, and such an insignificant one (insulting, actually) when reducing it?

Another glaring example of Autopac arithmetic.

HENRY N. KATZ
Winnipeg

Point was missed

REGARDING Lindor Reynolds' Oct. 22 article *Ain't no prince charming*. I was horrified to read Reynolds' article that denigrates women and transgenders involved in the sex trade. Although Reynolds claims to have compassion for the lives of sex-trade workers in Winnipeg, she unfortunately resorts to using mean-spirited language to describe the women in the video entitled, *Trying to Exit*.

She refers to one of the women in the video as a "crack whore" and says that she is "supposed to say she's a sex-trade worker with a drug addiction, which is a fancier way of coming to the same truth." When she labels women in the video "crack whores" she does not come close to the truth but rather reduces their complex lives to a cheap joke. In her efforts to sensationalize the issue by pulling pieces of their stories and presenting them so out of context with their reality, yet another shameful piece of garbage is being thrown at these women.

I was at the screening of this powerful video and talk-out, and what Reynolds neglects to report is that these courageous women and transgenders identified supports that would assist them in their struggle with homelessness, addictions and parenting. I heard these women talk about the urgent

need for addictions programs for women only, so that they are not propositioned in rehab programs by johns they knew on the street.

I heard these women talk about the need to have rehab programs available at the time when they recognize the need for treatment, not two weeks from now or a month from now. I heard these women talk about the need for income assistance that would provide reasonable accommodations where they are not confronted by drug dealers and where transitioning off the street might be that little bit easier. And I heard these women say they need a compassionate approach from workers in their efforts to remain connected with their children as they deal with the harsh reality of life on the streets.

I encourage people in Winnipeg to see this video as it beautifully demonstrates that, yes, these women are sex-trade workers and they are also artists, mothers, historians, sisters and daughters. People who view this video can then determine whether a better approach than that taken by Reynolds might be to stand beside these women, not to pity them, and to lobby for changes to bring about the necessary supports. Shame on Reynolds for missing the "fancy truth" of the matter.

BRENDA SLOBOZIAN
Executive Director
Mount Carmel Clinic
Winnipeg

Elect a new government

FRANCE has become an evening war zone in recent nights, and the images of burned-out shells of vehicles and buildings are becoming all too familiar. This is a civilized western nation and the police have not been able to protect the populace in the face of civil unrest. Sound familiar? Remember New Orleans? And this from a bunch of kids.

These crises are a strong argument against the promoters of our Liberal nanny-state, those who advocate calling 911 as the ultimate defence against violence and crime, a strong argument against those who view civilian firearms ownership as unnecessary in a modern democracy. I can picture Toronto in the grips of a similar crisis, with hundreds of suburb-dwellers hiding under their beds, blowing rape whistles and desperately calling 911 as gangs of thugs torch their property.

Then again, it could never happen in Canada, right? After all, we were promised a culture of safety and our city streets have never been safer. We've spent \$2 billion registering duck hunters while understaffed police departments struggle with insufficient budgets. We've seen violent crime blossom and yet our court system repeatedly hands out conditional sentences and a slap on the wrist to ethnic gang members convicted of violent offences and firearms violations.

Gun crime and gang violence are serious problems growing in our cities. It's about time we elected a serious government to deal with them. A serious government would put the blame where it belongs, on the criminal thugs who are responsible, rather than the law-abiding victims. A serious government recognizes that prosecution and jail time is about punishment and deterring crime as much as it is about rehabilitation. It's time to stand up for Canada. You can do so by voting out the people in charge.

MICHAEL R. THOMLINSON
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