



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on October 19, 2010

Strikes Threaten Sarkozy's Plan to Raise Retirement Age

The decline of Europe continues. German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned that permitting vast numbers of Muslim Turks into her country without their being assimilated into German society and culture is a failure. Her words, though true, come 40 years too late. Generations of Turks born in Germany have grown up without ever having either mastered the German language or grasped the notions of ordered liberty in the basic law of Germany.



President Sarkozy could have said the same thing about France, which contains entire enclaves inhabited almost entirely by embittered and alienated Muslims from former French Africa (and other Muslim areas). Sarkozy, though, has other things on his hands right now.

France has a statutory retirement age of 60, ridiculously low given modern life expectancy actuarial statistics. The French have a short work week as well. In fact, Sarkozy has been in trouble with the French electorate because of his efforts to raise the work week to 40 hours.

Proposed austerity measures in France have produced riots in recent days — riots sparked by [Sarkozy's proposal](#) to raise the retirement age to 62. Though Sarkozy has pointed out that 62 would still give France the lowest retirement age in the world, angry rioters in the streets of France insist that he could raise the employer's contribution to make up the pending shortfall in revenue in the retirement system. That will, of course, simply depress French business and fairly soon make the retirement age issue desperate. But no one on the streets of France is thinking beyond tomorrow. The French government has created an unproductive society.

Adding to French woes, the native population is reproducing at a rate that cannot sustain growth (i.e., France, without immigration, is actually losing population each year). The dramatic decline over the last few decades of genuine religious faith, which has long been tied to large families, is largely to blame. The "me too" attitude of the majority of the French — the desire for gratification in the present at the cost of following generations — has made any move to rein in costs very difficult. The riots are reminiscent of the strikes by Greek government workers earlier this year, which assumed that the government of Greece could simply ignore the economic decline of its nation and the impossible demands upon the public retirement system.

Many countries in Europe are coming out of the worst depression since the end of the Second World War, and there is no clear economic relief in sight. Vast numbers of young Muslims, who some Europeans believed might have bolstered the old-age retirement system in France, have high unemployment rates and work at relatively low-paying jobs. As their political clout grows, they will doubtless also demand an increasingly large share of the French social welfare pie. This "solution" to



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the problem of low birth rates in Europe — using immigrants with large families to cover the future payments — seems problematic.

The strikes in France, caused by Sarkozy's plan to rationalize somewhat the retirement system, is fracturing an already splintered country. The strikes are hitting French society hard, affecting oil refineries, garbage collection, trucking, air travel, and related areas. The French public, dependent upon these services, is growing increasingly impatient. No one in France seems happy these days, and things are bound to get worse.

Leaders like Sarkozy and Merkel are making belated efforts to hold back the tide of resentment and alienation in European society. It seems to be a losing battle.

Photo of Turks protesting: AP Images



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