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The enragés and the  
situationists in the  
occupation movement -  
France, May-June 1968  
by René Viénet





ENRAGÉS AND SITUATIONISTS IN THE OCCUPATION MOVEMENT

FRANCE, MAY-JUNE 1968

by

RENÉ VIÉNET

translated by Loren Goldner and Paul Sieveking from  
"Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations"  
Editions Gallimard, 1968

ISBN 0 950 5967 0 3      copy freely

*TIGER PAPERS PUBLICATIONS*

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Heslington  
York

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## FOREWORD

The author of this work does not hide his sympathies. So there may be some value in the assertion that he guarantees, and can prove the accuracy of, all reported facts and especially of all quoted documents. However, despite the truth of everything he has written he does not pretend to encompass adequately the whole of the occupation movement. The time for such work will come. At the moment there is almost no available material concerning the provinces and very little about the factories, even in the Parisian region. On the other hand, even in limiting himself to the aspects of the occupation movement studied here, the author could not discuss certain aspects of the event, doubtless of the greatest interest to the historian, because their divulgence could be used against various persons. Given the moment at which this book is to be published, this will be easily understood.

The author had the pleasure of collaborating with several members of the Situationist International, two of whom were former members of the Enragés group. Without them the book would certainly not have been written.

René Viénet, Brussels, 26th July 1968

"Concerning original history...the content of these histories is necessarily limited: their essential material is that which is living in the experience of the historian himself and in the current interests of men; that which is living and contemporary in their milieu.

The author describes that in which he has participated, or at least that which he has lived: relatively short periods, figures of individual men and their deeds...it is not sufficient to have been the contemporary of the events described, or to be well-informed about them. The author must belong to the class and social milieu of the actors he is describing; their opinions, way of thought and culture must be the same as his own. In order to really know phenomena and see them in their real context, one must be placed at the summit - not seeing them from below, through the keyhole of morality or any other wisdom."

Hegel, Reason in History



## 1 RETURN OF THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION

"Of course, Situationism isn't the spectre haunting industrial civilisation, any more than communism was the spectre haunting Europe in 1848."

Francois Châtelet, Nouvel Observateur, 3rd January 1968

History offers few examples of a social movement with such a depth of struggle as that which erupted in France in the Spring of 1968. It offers none which so many commentators said was unforeseeable. This explosion was one of the most foreseeable of all. The simple fact was that never had the knowledge and historical consciousness of a society been so mystified.

The Situationists, for example, who had denounced and fought the "organisation of appearances" of the spectacular stage of commodity society, had for years very precisely foreseen the explosion and its consequences. The critical theory elaborated and publicised by the Situationist International readily affirmed, as the precondition of any revolutionary program, that the proletariat had not been abolished; that capitalism was continuing to develop its own alienations; and that this antagonism existed over the entire surface of the planet, along with the social question posed for over a century. The S.I. explained the deepening and concentration of alienations by the delay of the revolution. That delay obviously flowed from the international defeat of the proletariat since the Russian counter-revolution, and from the complementary extension of capitalist economic development. The S.I. knew perfectly well, as did so many workers with no means of expressing it, that the emancipation of the workers still clashed everywhere with the bureaucratic organisations which are the workers' *autonomised representations*. The bureaucracy was constituted as a class in Russia, and subsequently in other countries, by the seizure of totalitarian state power. Elsewhere a stratum of privileged managers, trade unionists or party leaders in the service of the modern bourgeoisie worked to integrate the work force, whose courtiers they had become, into a rational management of the economy. The Situationists asserted that the permanent falsification necessary to the survival of these bureaucratic machines, a falsification directed first and foremost against all revolutionary acts and theories, was the master-key to the general falsification of modern society. They had also recognised and set out to unify the new forms of subversion whose first signs were becoming visible, and which were beginning confusedly to draw the perspective of a total critique from the unified oppressive conditions. Thus the Situationists demonstrated the imminence of a new revolutionary departure. For many people these perspectives seemed paradoxical, even demented. Now things have been clarified!

In the present return of the revolution *history itself* is the *unexpected factor* for the philosophers of the state (which is only natural) and the rabble of the pseudo-critique. It's obvious that analysis attains reality only by taking part in the real movement that suppresses existing conditions. The vacuum organised on this account makes everybody's way of life one which not everybody can decipher. It is in this sense that the *familiar* in alienated life and in the refusal of that life is not necessarily *known*. But for the revolutionary critique nothing was more clear and foreseen than the new era of class struggles ushered in by the Occupation Movement(1). The revolutionary critique brings its own theory to the practical movement, is deduced from it and is brought to the coherence which it seeks.

The Stalinists, ideologues of the bureaucratic totalitarian form of exploitation, were reduced in France, as elsewhere, to a purely conservative role. It had been impossible for them to take power for a long time, and the international dislocation of the bureaucratic monolith, which is necessarily their frame of reference, had closed this road to them for ever. At the same time, that frame of reference, and the practice it entails, makes their return to a purely bourgeois reformist apparatus equally impossible. The Maoist variation, reproducing as illusion the ascendant period of Stalinism by the religious contemplation of a revolutionary orient of fantasy, parrot their translations in a perfect vacuum. The three or four Trotskyist

sects fought bitterly amongst themselves for the glory of beginning the revolution of 1917 again, as soon as they had succeeded in reconstituting the adequate party. These "resuscitated Bolsheviks" were too fanatical about the revolutionary past and its worst errors even to look at modern conditions. Some of them mixed this historical exoticism with a geographic exoticism of a more or less Guevarist revolutionism of underdevelopment. If any of them picked up a militant from time to time this was in no way the result of the truth of their analyses or actions, but simply of the decomposition of the so-called Communist bureaucracies.

As for the modernist pseudo-thinkers of the critique of details, the leftovers of militancy who had established themselves in the so-called Humanities, and who were thinking for all the weekly magazines, it is obvious that they were incapable of understanding, let alone foreseeing, anything whatsoever, eclectically weighed down as they were with almost every aspect of the old world's camouflages. They found themselves attached to the bourgeois state, to an exhausted Stalinism, to a revitalised Castro-Bolshevism, to psycho-sociology, and even to their own miserable lives. They respected everything. They lied about everything. We find them around today, still ready to explain everything to us!

The great majority of the masses, mobilised by the revolutionary crisis of May, began to understand what they were living, and, consequently to understand what they had been living until then. And those who had been able to develop the clearest consciousness recognised the total theory of the revolution as their own. On the other hand, all the specialists of ideology and so-called agitational and subversive activism for the arousal of the masses, foresaw nothing and understood nothing. In such conditions what could they arouse but pity? They serenely replayed their usual music in the ruins of that dead time in which they had been able to think of themselves as the future elite of the revolution. The melody, so long foreseen for their baptism, proved only to be their funeral knell.

In fact the reappearance of critical theory and critical action historically constituted an objective unity. The era's new needs created their own theory and theoreticians. The dialog which began in this way, however limited and alienated by the dominant conditions of *separation*, moved towards its conscious subjective organisation. And, by the same movement, each one of its critiques began to discover all its tasks. Both of them erupted *first* as a struggle against the new aspects of exploitation in class society. On the one hand the wildcat strikes of the west and the working class insurrections of the east inaugurated in practice the struggle against the various bureaucracies. On the other hand present revolutionary theory began by a critique of the conditions of existence inherent in overdeveloped capitalism - the pseudo-abundance of *commodities* and the reduction of life to a *spectacle*, repressive urbanism and ideology - always in the service of specialists of domination. When the Situationist International formulated a coherent theory of this reality it also showed the negation of this reality in the combined realisation of art and philosophy in the liberation of everyday life(2). Thus the theory was both radically new and took up all the old truth of the provisionally repressed proletarian movement. The new program rediscovers at a higher level the project of the abolition of class society, of the accession at last to conscious history and the free construction of life, as well as rediscovering the form of *Workers' Councils* as its means.

The new revolutionary development in industrialised countries, which is at the centre of all modern history, can be dated from the workers' uprising in East Berlin in 1953, opposing the bureaucratic imposture in power with the demand for a "government of steel workers". The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 began the realisation of the power of the councils, though the country was not industrialised enough and the specific conditions were a national uprising against a foreign oppressor, impoverishment and general terror.

The beginning of the student agitation in Berkeley, in the autumn of 1964, questioned the organisation of life in the most developed capitalist country, beginning with the nature of education, and signalled a revolt which has since extended to almost all European countries (3). Nevertheless, this revolt, however advanced in



certain of its main themes, remained *partial* insofar as it was limited to the "student scene" (itself the object of rapid transformation related to the needs of modern capital). In as much as its recent political consciousness remained very fragmented, and weighed down with various neo-Leninist illusions, often including an imbecile respect for the Maoist farce of "cultural revolution". The question of the blacks, the Vietnamese war and Cuba occupied a disproportionate and mystifying position in the American students' struggle, which was, for all this, nonetheless real. This "anti-imperialism", reduced to a merely contemplative applause, almost always dominated the student movements in Europe. Since the summer of 1967 the West Berlin student movement had taken a violent turn - demonstrations spread throughout Germany in response to the attempt on Dutschke's life. The Italians went further, from December in 1967, particularly in Turin, occupying the factories and causing the closure of the major universities of the country at the beginning of 1968.

The current crisis of bureaucratic power in Czechoslovakia, the only advanced industrial country ever conquered by Stalinism, is essentially a question of a hazardous attempt by the ruling class to correct on its own initiative the functioning of its seriously failing economy. It was the pressure of agitation at the end of 1967 by the students and intelligents that made the bureaucracy decide to run the risk. The workers' strikes and the first rumblings of demands for direct factory control will henceforth make up the chief danger for a bureaucratic power obliged to feign liberalisation.

The bureaucratic appropriation of society is inseparable from a totalitarian possession of the state and the absolute reign of its ideology. The absence of censorship, the guarantee of free expression and the right of association pose in the very near future the following alternatives for Czechoslovakia: either a repression revealing the pure sham of these concessions, or else a proletarian assault against the bureaucratic property of the state and the economy, which would be unmasked as soon as the dominant ideology was deprived for any length of time of its ever-present police. The outcome of such a conflict will be of the greatest interest to the Russian bureaucracy, whose survival would be endangered by a victory of the Czech workers (4).

In March the important movement of Polish students also shook Gomulka's regime, the result of a successful bureaucratic reform after the crisis of 1956 and the crushing of the Hungarian workers. The reprieve that was won in that period is coming to an end. But this time the workers did not join the students, who were crushed in isolation. Only the pseudo-workers, party activists and police from the militias intervened in that moment of crisis.

In France, a decisive threshold has been crossed, in which the movement has rediscovered its deepest goals. The workers of a modern capitalist country returned en masse to radical struggle. Nothing can remain as before. Europe can only leap for joy and cry out: "Well dug, old mole!"

The Situationist scandal in Strassbourg in December 1966 had sounded the death knell for student-unionism in France. The local bureau of the UNEF (Union National des Etudiants Français) had suddenly declared itself in favour of the theses of the S.I., publishing Mustapha Khayati's pamphlet On Student Poverty... The method used, the ensuing trials and the implacable coherence of the analysis all contributed to the great success of this lampoon. We can speak here of the first successful attempt to communicate revolutionary theory to the currents which justify it. Approximately ten translations extended the audience of this text, notably in the USA and in Italy. If its immediate practical impact in France was less strongly felt, this was because the country was not yet involved in the struggles already in motion elsewhere. Nonetheless its arguments were not entirely foreign to the attempt which a faction of French "students" was to express later on, much more accurately than in any other country, for the whole of the student milieu, its rules and its shibboleths.

The richness of the revolutionary situation in France, which dealt Stalinism the hardest blow it ever sustained in the West, was expressed in the spontaneous take-

over by the workers, in their own right, of a large part of a movement explicitly criticising hierarchy, commodities, ideology, survival and spectacle. It is also significant to note that the positions or the phrases of the two books of Situationist theory which appeared in the last weeks of 1967 (5) were written on the walls of Paris and several provincial cities by the most advanced elements of the May uprising. The greater part of these theses took up the greater part of these walls. As was to be expected, Situationist theory has become a practical force taking hold of the masses.

#### Footnotes

(1) Philippe Labro, describing the French atmosphere before the crisis, in his book Ce N'est Qu'un Debut, (E.P.P. Denoel), ventures to remark that the Situationists thought they were speaking in a vacuum. A brave inversion of the truth. It was, of course, Labro, along with so many others, who thought the Situationists were speaking in a vacuum.

(2) The term "situationism", never used by the S.I., which is radically opposed to any doctrinal establishment of an ideology, has been abundantly thrown about by the press, lumped with the most fantastic definitions: "vanguard of the student movement" (20 Ans, June 1968), "technique of intellectual terrorism" (Journal de Dimanche, May 19th, 1968), and so on. Despite the S.I.'s obvious development of the historical thought issuing from the method of Marx and Hegel, the press has tried to assimilate the Situationists to anarchism. The definition by Carrefour, May 8th 1968: "more anarchist than the anarchists who they find too bureaucratic" is the model of the genre.

(3) It is nevertheless necessary to note the persistence of street struggles by radical Japanese students of the Zengekuren since 1960. Their example has been increasingly cited in France in recent years. The political position of their Revolutionary Communist League, to the left of Trotskyism, and simultaneously opposed to imperialism and bureaucracy, was less well-known than their street-fighting techniques.

(4) Three weeks after this book was turned over to the publisher, the intervention of the Russian army in Czechoslovakia, August 21st, demonstrated perfectly that the bureaucracy had to break the movement at any price. All the Western "fellow travellers" of the bureaucracy, with their displays of astonishment and regret, are naturally less lucid than their masters concerning the vital interests of those masters.

(5) La Societe du Spectacle by Guy Debord (Buchet-Chastel), available as The Society of the Spectacle (Black and Red, Detroit) and Traité de Savoir-Vivre a l'Usage des Jeunes Generations by Raoul Vaneigem (Gallimard) and available as The Revolution of Everyday Life (Practical Paradise Publications, London). [A history and compilation of Situationism and some of its writings was done by Chris Gray as Leaving the 20th Century - the incomplete work of the Situationist International (Free Fall Publications, London). The Strassbourg pamphlet, On the Poverty of Student Life - considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy, has been freely reproduced since 1966. Vaneigem's Totality for Kids has just become an English pamphlet (York Student Union, Anarchist and Existentialist-Marxist Groups). Along with the present text, however, one of the most interesting responses to May-June 1968 was Guy Debord's The Veritable Split in the Situationist International, (BM Piranha, London)]



## 2 ORIGIN OF THE AGITATION IN FRANCE

"Of course, utopians as well can see correctly the situation which they must leave. If they remain mere utopians, it is because they are in a position to see the situation only as a fact, or, at best, as a problem to be resolved, without ever realising that both the solution and the path leading to the solution are to be found precisely in the problem itself."

Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness

The refusal already being affirmed by wide sections of youth in other countries had been taken up in France only by a tiny fringe of advanced groups. No tendency towards economic or even political "crisis" could be observed. The agitation launched at Nanterre by four or five revolutionaries, who would later constitute the *Enragés*, was to lead in less than five months to the near-liquidation of the state. This is certainly food for thought. The profound crisis latent in France exists in all other modern bourgeois societies. What was lacking was a consciousness of a real revolutionary perspective and its practical organisation. Never did an agitation by such a small number of individuals lead in so short a time to such consequences.

The Gaullist regime, in itself, had no particular importance in the origin of this crisis. Gaullism is nothing but a bourgeois regime working at the modernisation of capitalism, in much the same fashion as Wilson's Labour Party. Its principle characteristic and success lies in the fact that the opposition in France is even more handicapped than elsewhere in attracting support for a program with precisely the same ends. We must nonetheless note two specific features: the Gaullist accession to power by plots and a military putsch, which marks the regime with a certain contempt for legality, and de Gaulle's personal cultivation of archaic prestige. It's ironical that this prestige, so completely lacking in France for a hundred years, began to reappear only with the recent movement, and precisely by shattering the plaster prestige of Gaullism.

The modernisation of the French economy, though undramatic, didn't take place without a certain recession and drop in real salaries through the expedient of Government decrees on social security and a growth in unemployment, especially for young workers. This was the pretext for the exemplary working class riot in Caen in January, where the workers overstepped trade union demands and looted several stores. In March steel workers of the Garnier factory in Redon were able to bring every factory in the town into their victorious strike, creating their own links independently of the trade unions, and organising their own self-defence, forcing a CRS\* (riot police) withdrawal.

The direct repercussions of the Strassbourg affair were first felt at the university dormitories of Jussieu, near Lyon, where, since the Spring of 1967 the residents had for several weeks abolished every regulation, thus going beyond the academic debate on the reform of anti-sexual statutes. From the beginning of December 1967 the "students" of Nantes went further still. After taking over the local branch of the UNEF they decided to close the Bureau d'Aide Psychologique Universitaire. They then organised several invasions of the university residence halls: men in the women's dormitories, followed by women in the men's. Finally, in February, they seized the Nantes Rectorate and fought the police ferociously. As Rivarol wrote on May 3rd "It has largely been forgotten that, as early as February, the riots at Nantes showed the real face of these 'situationists', 1500 students under red and black flags, the Hall of Justice occupied..."

The *Enragé* group was formed during a struggle against police presence in Nanterre. Some plainclothesmen had been photographed and on January 26th enlarged reproductions were displayed on posters inside the faculty. This action brought on, at the request of Dean Grappin, the intervention of sixty uniformed men who were driven off after a brief confrontation. Several hundred leftist militants had joined the original instigators. These included the *Enragés* as such, along with a dozen an-

archists. The *Enragés* were among the least assimilated elements of the university system at that time. Moreover these "campus bums" had found their way to a theoretical agreement with the platform of the Situationist International. They began a systematic assault on the unbearable order of things, beginning with the university.

The environment was particularly revolting. Nanterre was modern in its faculty appointments exactly as it was modern in its architecture. It was here that the cretins of submissive thought pontificated - the knaves of recuperation, the modernist nullities of social integration, the Lefebvres and Touraines (1). The scene was perfect: the urbanism of isolation had grafted a university centre onto the high-rise flats and their complementary slums. It was a microcosm of the general conditions of oppression, the spirit of a world without spirit. Thus the program of preventing the specialists of illusion from speaking *ex cathedra* and the use of the walls for a critical vandalism was to have a great effect. This opened the exit from the sterile protest regurgitated for years against the pettiness of the dormitory monitors or the Fouchet reform, made to order for the UNEF and for all those who coveted leadership.

When the *Enragés* began to interrupt the courses of the Sociologists and several others, the UNEF and its leftist infiltrators reacted with indignation. On several occasions they themselves attempted to protect the professors. The Anarchists, despite intentions of their own regarding the local UNEF committee, stayed neutral. Among them, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had already carved out for himself something of a reputation by excusing himself for having insulted a Minister, was threatened with no less than expulsion from the UNEF on a motion by the Trotskyists (who later became the Federation of Revolutionary Students, known at the time as the CLER). Only because Cohn-Bendit, a German national, had been called to appear before the committee on expulsions at the Prefecture (police station) did the CLER decide to withdraw their motion. The scandals of the *Enragés* were already finding an echo in a certain political agitation. Their song about Grappin and their first comic-strip poster appeared on the occasion of the "National Day" of university residence occupations, February 14th. On every side things were getting hotter.

On February 21st the Nouvel Observateur wept over Nanterre: "The left has dissolved leaving nothing but the *Enragés* who include no-one but three or four representatives of the Situationist International." The same day the *Enragés* issued a tract making clear that they "had never belonged to the Situationist International and therefore could not claim to represent it in any way. Repression would be child's play if every demonstration that showed the slightest radicalism were the result of a Situationist plot!... Having said that we nevertheless reaffirm our sympathy for the Situationist critique. Our accord with radical theory can be judged by our acts."

On March 22nd the leftist groups invaded the administration building and held a meeting in the university council room. In the name of the *Enragés*, René Riesel immediately demanded the expulsion of two observers from the administration and of several Stalinists who were present. After a spokesman for the Anarchists, a regular collaborator of Cohn-Bendit, had asserted that "The Stalinists who are here this evening are no longer Stalinists", the *Enragés* immediately left the meeting in protest against this cowardly illusion. They had, moreover, been accused of wanting to wreck the union offices. They set about writing their slogans on the walls: "Take your desires for reality", "Boredom is counter-revolutionary", "Trade unions are brothels", "Never work", etc. This ushered in a form of agitation that was to enjoy a far-reaching success and become one of the original characteristics of the period of occupations. Thus the gathering of various leftist elements which would be called in the following weeks "The Movement of the 142" and then the "March 22nd Movement" began to constitute itself that evening, without and against the *Enragés*.

From the beginning the March 22nd Movement was an eclectic conglomerate of individuals who joined it under purely personal auspices. They all agreed on the fact that it was impossible for them to agree on any theoretical point and counted on "common action" to overcome this gap. There was nevertheless a consensus on two

\* Abbreviations and references are listed at the back of this book



subjects, one a ridiculous banality and the other a new requirement. The banality was the anti-imperialist "struggle", heritage of the contemplative period of the leftist groups which was about to end, Nanterre, that suburban Vietnam, lending its resolute support to insurgent Bolivia. The novelty was direct democracy in the organisation. It is true that this intention was only partially realised in the March 22nd Movement because of the double allegiance of most of its members, which problem was discretely ignored or never considered. There were Maoists, JCRs, anarchists of all kinds, from the ruins of the "Anarchist Federation" to the activists of the "Iberian Federation of Libertarian Youth", and up to and including the comical or questionable adherence of the "groups of institutional research" (FGERI) (2)

Cohn-Bendit himself belonged to the independent and semi-theoretical anarchist group around the magazine Noir et Rouge. Because of this, and his personal qualities Cohn-Bendit found himself in the most radical tendency of the March 22nd Movement and more truly revolutionary than the whole of the movement whose spokesman he was to become, and which he therefore had to tolerate (3). Cohn-Bendit, insufficiently intelligent, confusedly informed by various individuals on the theoretical problems of the period, skillful enough to entertain a student audience, frank enough to do the job in the arena of leftist manoeuvres, supple enough to work with their spokesmen, was an honest but only an adequate revolutionary. He knew much less than he should have known and did not make the best of what he knew. Besides, by uncritically accepting a star role, exhibiting himself for the mob of reporters from the spectacular media, Cohn-Bendit naturally had to watch his remarks, which always combined lucidity with nonsense, the latter being increased by the distortion inherent in that kind of communication. In April he was still declaring to anyone that he was a moderate and in no way an Enragé. That was the time when the press, following a Minister, began to call all the Nanterre rebels "Enragés".

The March 22nd Movement had in fact got in a few days the chief success that had any bearing on the larger movement as a whole, and which had no relationship at all with the chatter about the "critical university", pirated from the German and Italian examples, and whose inanity it already revealed (4). Whereas all the efforts of its committee on "Culture and Creativity" had never gone beyond a revolutionary aestheticism which even some meagre traces of "situationism" could not make interesting, the simple-minded "anti-imperialist" project of holding a meeting at Nanterre on March 29th pushed Dean Grappin to the first and most consequential of a series of administrative blunders which rapidly extended the agitation. Grappin closed his campus for two days. The menacing spectre of a "handful of Enragés" was beginning to haunt the national consciousness.

Among the most concerned, L'Humanité on March 29th denounced the "commando actions undertaken by a group of anarchists and 'situationists', one of whose slogans - in giant letters - DON'T WORK! decorated the entrance to the campus. For these forty or so students, activity has consisted for several weeks in 'intervening' in the lecture halls and discussion sections... occupying the buildings and finally covering the walls with gigantic slogans. How has a handful of irresponsible elements been able to provoke such serious decisions, affecting 12,000 students in Letters and 4,000 in Law?"

The repression that began at that moment came too late. Of course, one of the Enragés, Gérard Bigorgne, was effectively expelled for five years from all institutions of Higher Learning in France without a word from the March 22nd Movement, its journalists or any other leftist groups (he was reproached for his open contempt for university rules, and his attitude in front of University Council was in fact scandalous). But renewed threats of expulsion against Cohn-Bendit, already fairly famous and certainly more defensible for many people, the announcement that Riesel, Cohn-Bendit and six other agitators from Nanterre were to be brought before the Committee on Instruction of the University of Paris on May 6th, and, finally, the closing until further notice of Nanterre on May 2nd, provoked an expansion of the agitation among Parisian students. The March 22nd Movement and the UNEF called for a meeting in the courtyard of the Sorbonne on Friday May 3rd. By trying to break up the meeting the authorities unleashed the accumulated strength of the movement and provoked it to cross the decisive threshold. How impossible such a development ap-

peared to specialised 'observers' is perfectly demonstrated by the brilliant prophesy of the ridiculous Escarpit, who wrote in Le Monde on May 4th: "Nothing is less revolutionary, nothing more conformist than the pseudo-anger of a window-breaker, even if he dresses his anti-mandarism in Marxist or situationist language."

#### Footnotes

(1) Touraine had discovered, towards the end of the 1950s, that the proletariat had disappeared. He persisted in July 1968: "I'll say it again: the working class, as a whole, is no longer a fully revolutionary class in France." (in Labro, Ce N'est Qu'un Debut)

(2) At no time was there a single Situationist in this grab-bag, contrary to the lie of Emile Copfermann in his introduction to the collection of ineptitudes published by the March 22nd Movement under the title of Ce N'est Qu'un Debut, Continuations le Combat (Editions Maspero)

(3) Cohn-Bendit, in a number of interviews, multiplied his concessions to Maoism. For example, in Le Magazine Littéraire of May 1968: "I don't really know that much about what Maoism is. I've read things in Mao that are very true. His thesis of reliance upon the peasantry has always been an anarchist thesis."

(4) All the sociologico-journalistic eulogies on the "originality" of the March 22nd Movement masked the simple fact that its leftist amalgam, while new in France, was a direct copy of the American SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), itself equally eclectic, 'democratic' and frequently infiltrated by various Old Leftist sects. Georges Steiner in the Sunday Times of July 21st, enumerating with perfect incomprehension the theses of the SI which he considers to be "probably the most advanced of the radical factions", nonetheless saw that Cohn-Bendit was a "weather-beaten conservative" compared with such "absolutists".



### 3 THE STRUGGLE IN THE STREETS

"I know that you count them for nothing, because the court is armed; but I beg you to let me say that they should count for a great deal the moment they count themselves for everything. That is the point they have come to: they themselves are beginning to count your armies for nothing, and it's very unfortunate that their strength lies precisely in their imagination. One could truly say that what makes them different from all other forms of power is their ability, having reached a certain point, to do everything of which they believe themselves capable."

Cardinal de Retz, Memoires

In itself the meeting of May 3rd was banal: three or four hundred assistants as usual had responded to the call. The few dozen fascists of the "Occident" group counter-demonstrated at the beginning of the afternoon on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Several Enragés at the Sorbonne called for the organisation of self-defence. Furniture had to be broken up as there were no clubs. Rector Roche and his policemen thought this would be a sufficient pretext for an attack. The police and the *gendamerie mobile* invaded the courtyard of the Sorbonne without meeting resistance. The students were encircled. The police then offered them free passage out of the courtyard. The students accepted and the first to leave were in fact allowed to pass. The operation took time and other students began to gather. The remaining 200 demonstrators inside the Sorbonne, including all the organisers, were arrested. With the departure of the police vans that were taking them off, the Latin Quarter erupted. One of the two vans never reached its destination. Only three policemen guarded the prisoners in the second van. They were beaten up and several dozen demonstrators escaped.

It was the first time in many years that several thousand students had fought the police for so long and with such energy. Endless charges, greeted with hails of paving stones, failed to clear the Boulevard Saint-Michel and the adjoining streets until several hours later. Six hundred people were arrested.

The immediate reaction of the Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur (the National Union of Employees in Higher Education, SNESup) and of the UNEF was to call for an unlimited strike in higher education. The stiff prison sentences handed out to the four demonstrators on May 4th only confirmed the demonstration that had been called for May 6th to put pressure on the University Council.

Naturally the Stalinists did all they could to break the movement. George Marchais' editorial in L'Humanité on May 3rd, which expressed this policy almost at the level of parody, angered the mass of students. From that moment on the Stalinists found themselves denied the floor in all the centres of revolutionary agitation which the students began to create.

The whole of May 6th was marked by demonstrations which turned into riots early in the afternoon. The first barricades were thrown up at the Place Maubert and defended for three hours. At the same time fights with the police were breaking out at the bottom of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, at the Place du Châtelet and in Les Halles. By the early evening the demonstrators numbered more than 10,000 and were mainly holding the area around the Place Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where they had been reinforced only after 6p.m. by the bulk of the march organised by the UNEF at Denfert-Rochereau (1). "What followed," wrote Le Monde on May 8th, "surpassed in scope and violence everything that had happened throughout an already astonishing day. It was a kind of street fighting that sometimes reached a frenzy, where every blow delivered was immediately returned, and where ground that had scarcely been conquered was just as quickly retaken... There were dramatic and senseless moments which, for the observer, seemed rife with madness." And L'Aurore on May 7th noted: "Alongside the demonstrators could be seen bands of young hoods

(*blousons noirs*) armed with steel bars, who had come in from the outlying areas of Paris to help out the students." The fighting lasted until after midnight, especially at Montparnasse.

For the first time cars had been overturned and set fire, paving stones dug up for the barricades, and stores looted. The use of subversive slogans, which had begun at Nanterre, had now spread to several parts of Paris. Insofar as the rioters were able to strengthen the barricades and thus their own capacity for counterattack, the police were forced to abandon direct charges for a position strategy which relied mainly on offensive grenades and tear-gas.

May 6th also marked the first intervention of workers, *blousons noirs*, the unemployed, and high school students who that morning had organised important demonstrations. The spontaneity and violence of the riots stood in vivid contrast to the platitudes put forth by their academic initiators as goals and slogans (2). The very fact that the *blousons noirs* had fought in the streets shouting "The Sorbonne to the Students!" marked an end to an entire era. A week later these politicised *blousons noirs* were themselves at the Sorbonne.

The UNEF, which had been denouncing the violence throughout the Monday, was obliged to change its rhetoric the following day to avoid being totally discredited and to continue its moderating activity. On the other hand the Stalinists of the CGT, giving up completely, preferred to cut themselves off totally from the students in order to keep their hold on the working class, which was still isolated from the fighting. Seguy proclaimed at an evening press conference that there would be "no complacency towards the troublemakers and provocateurs who were denigrating the working class, accusing it of being bought off by the bourgeoisie, and who have the outrageous pretention of trying to inculcate it with revolutionary theory and to lead its struggle. Along with other leftists, certain elements are trying to strip student unionism of its legitimate demands and of its mass democratic nature for the benefit of the UNEF. But they are only acting in the interests of established power..."

It was precisely in this context that Geismar, Sauvageot and Cohn-Bendit could become the *apparent leaders* of a leaderless movement. The press, radio and television, in their search for leaders, found no-one besides them. They became the inseparable and photogenic stars of a spectacle hastily pasted over the revolutionary reality. By accepting that role they spoke in the name of a movement they did not understand. Of course, to do this they had to accept the greater part of its revolutionary tendencies as far as they manifested themselves (Cohn-Bendit was able to reflect somewhat better this radical content). But since this holy family of impoverished neo-leftism could only be the spectacular deformation of the real movement, it represented its most caricatured image. Their Trinity, endlessly offered through the mass media, represented in fact the real *communication* which was being sought and realised in the struggle. This trio of ideological charm of 819 varieties could obviously only say the acceptable - and therefore the deformed and recuperated - tolerated by such a means of transmission. While the real meaning of the moment which had propelled them out of the void was purely *unacceptable*.

The demonstration of May 7th was so well controlled by the UNEF and its hard-pressed monitors that it limited itself to an endless march authorised for an absurd route: from Denfert to the Etoile and back. The demonstrators asked for nothing more than the reopening of the Sorbonne, the withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter and the release of the imprisoned students. They continued to fool around for another two days, during which only minor scuffles took place. But the Government was reluctant to fulfill even these modest demands. They promised to reopen the Sorbonne, but Sauvageot and Geismar, who were already being accused of betrayal by an impatient base, were forced to announce that the building would be occupied day and night for a sit-in and a discussion of "the problems of the university". In these circumstances Minister Peyrefitte maintained the police presence in the Latin quarter while reopening Nanterre as a test to measure the "goodwill" of the students.

On Friday 10th more than 20,000 people met once again at Denfert-Rochereau (3). The same organisers discussed where it would be best to lead the demonstration. After a



long debate they decided on the ORTF (radio and television centre), but with an initial detour past the Ministry of Justice. Arriving at the Latin Quarter, they found all the streets leading to the Seine blocked by the police, which was enough to condemn once and for all the absurd itinerary. They decided to stay in the Latin Quarter until the Sorbonne was returned to them. At about 9pm the first barricades went up spontaneously. Everyone recognised instantly the reality of their desires in that act. Never had the passion for destruction shown itself to be so creative. Everyone ran to the barricades.

The leaders had completely lost control. They had to accept the *fait accompli* while making clumsy attempts to minimise it. They protested that the barricades should not be offensive and *that the police should not be provoked!* Doubtless the forces of order had committed a bad tactical error by allowing the barricades to go up without immediately risking an attack to tear them down. But the construction of a system of barricades solidly defending an entire quarter *was already* an unforgivable step towards the negation of the state: any form of statist power would be obliged to reconquer as quickly as possible the barricaded zone that had escaped its power, or else dissolve. (It was because of the excess of ideological distortion maintained by their idiotic spokesmen that so many people on the barricades believed that the police would not attack them).

The barricaded quarter was circumscribed by the Boulevard Saint-Michel to the west and Rue Mouffetard to the east, Rue Claude Bernard to the south and the Place du Pantheon to the north, lines touched upon but not controlled by its defences. Its principle thoroughfares were the Rues Gay-Lussac, Llomond and Tournefort, going north-west and south-east, and the Rue d'Ulm going north and south. Rue Pierre Curie and Rue Ursulines-Thuillier were the only communications east and west. The area in the hands of the insurgents had an independent existence from 10pm until just after 2am. Attacked at 2.15am by forces moving in from all sides, the quarter was able to defend itself for more than three hours, continually losing ground on the western section and holding out until 5.30am at the approaches to the Rue Mouffetard.

Between 1500 and 2,000 people remained on the barricades at the moment of attack. Students did not make up even half that number. On hand were a large number of high school students, *blousons noirs* and a few hundred workers - and not only *young* workers. This was the elite. This was "the scum" (*pègre*). Many foreigners and girls took part in the fight. The revolutionary elements of almost all the leftist groups were there, notably a large number of anarchists, even some members of the Anarchist Federation, carrying black flags and bitterly defending their stronghold at the intersection of the Rues de l'Estrapade, Blainville and Thouin. The residents of the area showed their sympathy for the same rioters who were burning their cars by giving them food, water to combat the effects of the gas, and finally refuge from the police.

The sixty barricades, of which twenty were quite solid, allowed a rather long defence and even some respite from the battle within a limited perimeter. The weakness of the improvised weapons and particularly the lack of organisation which made it impossible to launch any counter-attacks to widen the combat-zone left the rioters caught in a dragnet.

The last pretensions of those who hoped to lead the movement collapsed during the night in shameful resignation and pure impotence. The FER, which had the best disciplined flock, paraded its 500 militants up to the barricades to declare that the whole affair was the result of provocation and that it was thus necessary to leave. Which they did, red flag and all. At the same time Cohn-Bendit and Sauvegeot, still imprisoned by their obligations as stars, went to tell Rector Roche that "to avoid any bloodshed" the police should be withdrawn from the quarter. This extravagant request, made at such a moment to a man with absolutely no power in the situation, was so surpassed by events that it could only give rise to an hour of the most naive illusions. Roche simply advised those who had come to consult with him to tell "the students" to give up and go home.

The battle was very rough. The CRS, the police and the *gendamerie mobile* succeeded in making the barricades untenable by an immense bombardment of incendiary, off-

ensive and chloride gas grenades before they were willing to risk an assault. The rioters responded with paving stones and Molotov cocktails. They set fire to cars turned over in zig-zag lines of defence to slow down the enemy advance. Some got onto roofs to drop all sorts of projectiles onto the police. Several times the police were forced back. More often the revolutionaries set fire to the barricades they could no longer hold. There were several hundred injured and 500 arrests. Four or five hundred were taken into the building of the Ecole Normale Supérieure on the Rue d'Ulm, which the police did not dare to enter. Two or three hundred others had been able to pull back to the Rue Monge, or escape over the roofs. The police swept the quarter until noon, beating up and taking off any suspects they could find.

#### Footnotes

(1) Here it is important to point out the gap between the attitude of the organisers and the real struggle that had been under way for hours: "At the approaches to Place Denfert-Rochereau, where no police were to be seen... barricades were thrown up with materials from various construction yards in the area, despite the orders of the UNEF monitors and several other student organisations." (*Le Monde*, May 8th)

(2) "End the Repression", "Free Our Comrades", "Roche Resign", "Freedom For the Trade Unions", "Sorbonne for the Students". The same backwardness is to be found in the tone of the declaration of the national offices of the Fédération des Etudiants Revolutionnaires (FER), which on the following day hailed the "thousands of students and young workers who responded to the call of the UNEF to defend democratic and trade union freedom and who found themselves engaged all Monday with the repressive forces of the Gaullist state." (Author's emphasis)

(3) The University Council, which was supposed to meet that day to consider the situation at Nanterre, decided to postpone its session because it felt that the necessary calm was not at hand. An anonymous tract, distributed on the 6th, The Council of the University of Paris: Instructions For Use, had revealed the addresses and phone numbers of all its members. The declaration of Rene Riesel, The Castle Is Burning! could therefore not be read by the judges, but was simply distributed to the demonstrators.



"This is where the objective conditions of historical consciousness are reunited. This is where direct *active* communication is realised, where specialisation, hierarchy and separation end, where the existing conditions are transformed 'into conditions of unity'... Only there is the spectacular negation of life negated in its turn. The appearance of the Councils was the highest reality of the proletarian movement in the first quarter of this century, a reality which was not seen or was travestied because it disappeared with the rest of the movement which was denied and eliminated by the entire historical experience of the time. In this new moment of proletarian critique, the result returns as the only undefeated point of the defeated movement. The historical consciousness which knows that this is the only milieu where it can exist can now recognise it, no longer at the periphery of what is ebbing, but at the centre of what is rising."

Guy Debord, The Society of the Spectacle

The night of the battle around the Rue Gay-Lussac created a stupor throughout the country. The indignation linked with that stupor for a large part of the population was not directed against the rioters, in spite of the extent of the destruction they had done, but against the excessive violence of the forces of order. The radio had given a minute-by-minute account of the conditions throughout the night in which the entrenched camp had defended itself and been defeated. It was generally known that a large number of those who had been seriously injured had not received treatment for hours because the beseigers would not let them out. The police also came under fire for the widespread use of a new and ferocious gas, despite earlier denials of its use by the authorities. Finally, it was widely believed that there had been a number of deaths which the police had covered up once they had reconquered the area (1).

On Saturday, May 11th, the whole trade union leadership put out a call for a *one day* general strike on the 13th. For them it was simply a question of putting an end to the movement while getting as much as possible out of the solidarity superficially affirmed "against the repression". The trades unions were also forced to make this gesture because they saw the profound impression which a week of direct struggle had made on the workers. Such an example was in itself a threat to their authority. Their recuperative strike would not respect the time legally required for forewarning; that was to be its sole subversive aspect.

The Government, which had at first reacted with a threatening statement evoking a plot and calling for harsh measures when the last barricade had fallen in the early morning, decided on a complete turnabout in face of the protest. Premier Pompidou, who had returned from Afghanistan on Saturday night, quickly dealt the card of appeasement. He announced that the convicted students would be freed immediately after a new trial, thereby throwing over any hypocrisy concerning the autonomy of the courts. This was in fact carried out. He granted the buildings of the Censier annexe of the Faculté des Lettres, beginning on Sunday, for the legal sit-in that had been demanded for discussion of university reform. The discussion began at once and for several days the studious and moderate atmosphere bore the strain of its birth. Finally Pompidou promised to withdraw all police from the Latin Quarter on Monday, along with the roadblocks at the entrances of the Sorbonne. On the morning of May 13th the police had decamped and the Sorbonne was there *for the taking*.

Throughout the day of the 13th the call for the strike was widely observed. In an orderly demonstration nearly one million workers, along with students and professors, crossed Paris from the République to Denfert-Rochereau, meeting with general sympathy along the way. The slogans affirmed the solidarity of workers and students

and demanded, on the tenth anniversary of his coming to power, the departure of de Gaulle. More than a hundred black flags were scattered through a multitude of red ones, realising for the first time the union of the two flags which would shortly become the symbol of the most radical current of the Occupation Movement, not so much the result of an autonomous anarchist presence as an affirmation of worker democracy.

The trade unionists had no trouble getting the crowd to disperse at Denfert. A few thousand demonstrators, mainly students, left for the Champ-de-Mars to hold a meeting. At the same time other students were starting the Sorbonne occupation. There an event of decisive importance took place: those students present decided to open the Sorbonne to the workers. The abstract slogan of the demonstration - Worker-Student Solidarity - was taken seriously for the first time. This step had been prepared by the real encounter with workers that had taken place that day, and especially by the direct dialog between the students and advanced workers who had come over from the demonstration to say that they had supported the student struggle from the beginning, and to denounce the manipulation of the Stalinists. A certain workerism, cultivated by the bureaucratic specialists of revolution, was certainly bound up in this decision. But what their leaders had said without any conviction and without any real sense of the consequences, took on revolutionary implications because of the atmosphere of *total freedom* which reigned at the Sorbonne, and which completely undermined the implicit paternalism of their plans. In fact few workers actually came to the Sorbonne. But because the Sorbonne had been declared open to the populace the lines between "the student problem" and a concerned public had been broken. And because the Sorbonne was beginning to have a truly democratic discussion which called everything into question and which sought to implement decisions arrived at collectively, it became a beacon to workers all over the country by showing them their own possibilities.

The complete freedom of expression showed itself in the seizure of the walls as well as in free discussions in all assemblies. The posters of all tendencies, including the Maoists, shared the walls without being torn down or defaced - only the Stalinists of the Communist Party chose to abstain. Painted inscriptions appeared a little later. That evening the first revolutionary slogan placed in comicstrip form on one of the frescoes the famous formula: "Humanity will not be happy until the last bureaucrat is hanged with the guts of the last capitalist." This met with some resistance. After a public debate the majority voted to efface it, which was done (2).

On May 14th the Committee of the Enragés and the Situationist International was founded (3). They immediately began putting up posters on the walls of the Sorbonne which meant what they said. One warned against the illusion of a direct democracy billeted in the Sorbonne. Another called for vigilance: "The recuperators are amongst us!" Still another came out against "any survival of art" and the "reign of separation". Finally, one poster called for "the immediate deChristianisation of the Sorbonne", and attacked the guilty conscience shown by the occupants towards the chapel, which still remained intact. It called for the disinterment and dispatching of the "remains of the foul Richelieu, statesman and cardinal to the Elysée Palace and the Vatican." It should be noted that this was the first poster in the Sorbonne to be surreptitiously torn down by people who disapproved of its content. The Committee on Culture and Creativity breathed its last on May 14th, with some posters of various quotations by the SI, notably from Vaneigem's book.

May 14th also saw the first general assembly of the occupants. It proclaimed itself sole power in the Sorbonne and organised the activities of the occupation. Three tendencies emerged in the debate: a considerable number of assistants who said little but revealed their moderation by applause for certain idiotic speeches simply wanted a university reform, an agreement on examinations, and a sort of academic front with the left-wing professors. A stronger current, which brought together the leftist groups and their members, wanted to push the struggle on to the fall of Gaullism or even of capitalism. A third position, put forward by a tiny minority, but listened to nonetheless, demanded the abolition of class society, wage



labour, the spectacle and survival. It was clearly articulated in a declaration by René Riesel in the name of the Enragés. He said that the question of the university had long since been surpassed and that "exams had been cancelled at the barricades". He asked the assembly to come out for the freedom of all rioters, including those looters arrested on May 6th. He showed that the only future of the movement was with the workers, not "in their service", but at their sides, and, finally, that the workers were in no way to be confused with their bureaucratic organisations. He asserted that the present alienation could not be fought while ignoring the alienations of the past - "No more chapels!" - nor those being prepared for tomorrow - "Sociologists and Psychologists are the new police". He denounced police authority of the same kind in hierarchical relations with professors. He warned of the recuperation of the movement by leftist leaders, and of its foreseeable liquidation by Stalinists. He concluded with a call for all power to the Workers' Councils.

There were diverse reactions to his intervention. Riesel's proposal concerning the looters got much more jeering than applause. The attack on the professors shocked the audience, as did the first open attack on the Stalinists. Nonetheless, when the assembly chose the first "Occupation Committee", its executive organ, Riesel was elected. Alone among the candidates to have indicated his political allegiances, he was also the only one with a stated program. Speaking a second time he made it clear he would defend "direct democracy in the Sorbonne" and the perspective of the international power of Workers' Councils.

The occupation of the faculties and schools of higher education had begun in Paris - the Beaux-Arts, Nanterre, Conservatoire d'Art Dramatique, Médecine. All the rest would follow.

At the end of the day, May 14th, the workers of the Nantes Sud-Aviation plant occupied their factory and barricaded themselves in after locking director Duvochel and the managers in the offices and soldering the doors. Apart from the example of the Sorbonne, the workers had learnt from the incidents which had taken place at Nantes the night before. At the call of the Nantes office of the UNEF which, as we have seen before, was controlled by revolutionaries, the students refused to limit themselves to a march with the trade unionists. They marched on the police station to demand the cancellation of proceedings recently begun against them and to demand the restoration of the annual fund of 10,000 Francs, which had been taken away after their radical turn. They threw up two barricades which the CRS tried to take back. Some university personnel presented themselves as intermediaries and a truce was made which the prefect of police used to receive a delegation. He gave in on every point. The rector withdrew his complaint with the police and restored the funds. A number of workers from the city had taken part in the fighting and seen the effectiveness of this type of demand. The workers at Sud-Aviation would remember it the next day. The Nantes students immediately offered to support the picket lines.

The occupation of Sud-Aviation, which became generally known on May 15th, was understood by everyone as an act of the greatest importance: if other factories followed the example of that wildcat strike the movement would become irreversibly that historical crisis awaited by the most lucid minds. At noon the Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne sent a telegram of support to the Sud-Aviation strike committee - "From the occupied Sorbonne to occupied Sud-Aviation".

This was the only activity of which the Occupation Committee was capable for most of the day, and even this was due to Riesel's initiative. In fact, from its first meeting the Committee found itself faced with a stupefying contrast between the function delegated to it by the general assembly and the real conditions with which it had to work. The Occupation Committee was composed of 15 members elected and revocable on a daily basis by the general assembly and answerable to it alone. All the services which had been improvised or which remained to be organised for the running and defence of the building were placed under its control. Its responsibilities entailed making free discussion possible on a permanent basis, of assuring and facilitating the extension of the activities already under way, which ranged from the distribution of rooms and food and the democratic diffusion of written

and verbal information to the maintenance of security. The reality was quite different: the discredited bureaucrats of the UNEF and the old tandem of Kravetz and Peninou re-emerged from the oblivion which had rightly engulfed them, and slipped into the corridors they knew so well to install themselves in a cellar. From there they prepared to gather up all the reigns of *real power* and to coordinate the actions of all sorts of benevolent technicians who turned out to be their friends. It was a "Co-ordination Committee" which had elected itself. The "Inter-Faculty Liaison Committee" worked for itself. Its staff, completely autonomous, obeyed no one but their leader, a nice guy on the whole, who had appointed himself and was interested in discussion only from that position of strength. The "Press Committee" which was made up of young or future journalists, was not at the disposal of the Sorbonne, but of the French press as a whole. As for the sound equipment, it was quite simply in the hands of right-wing elements who happened to be specialists in electronics.

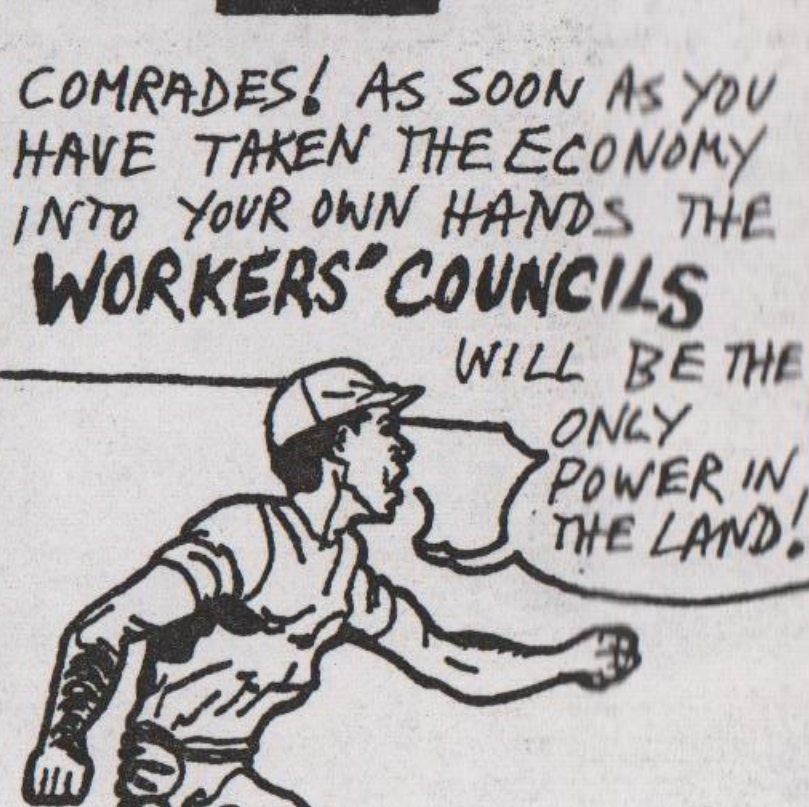
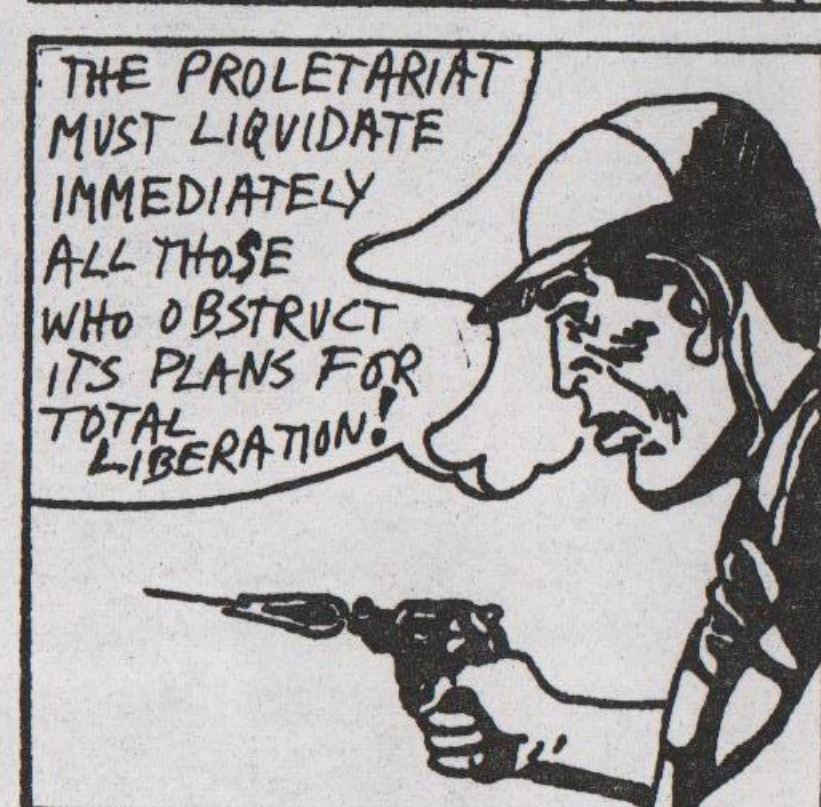
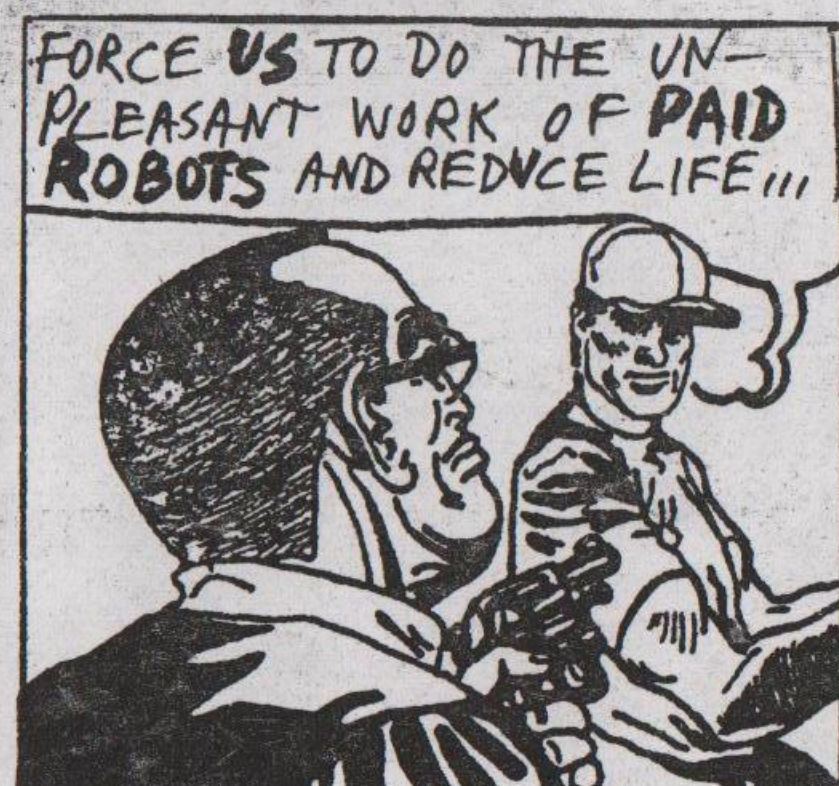
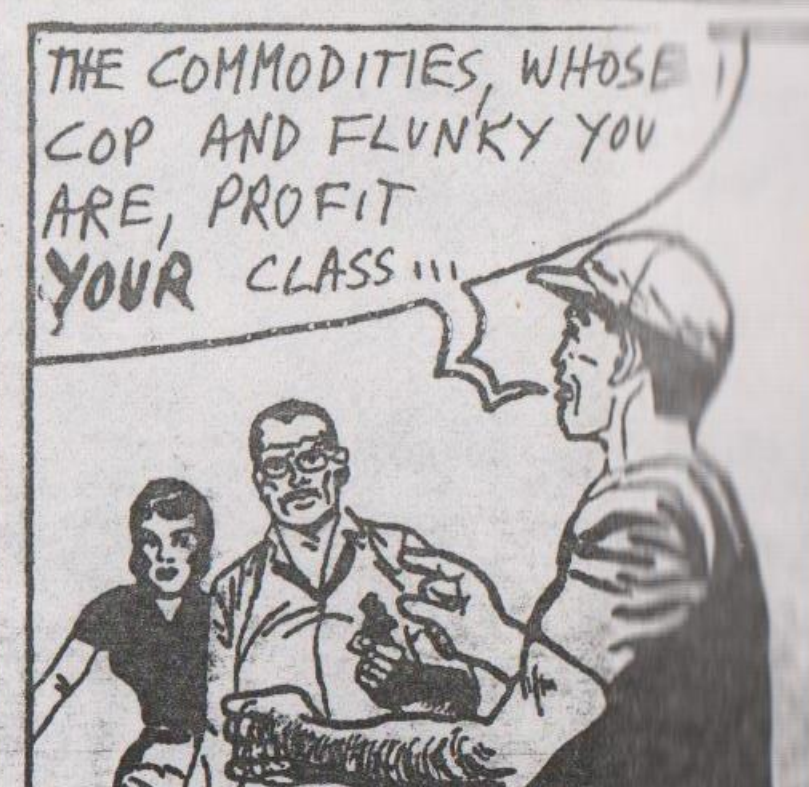
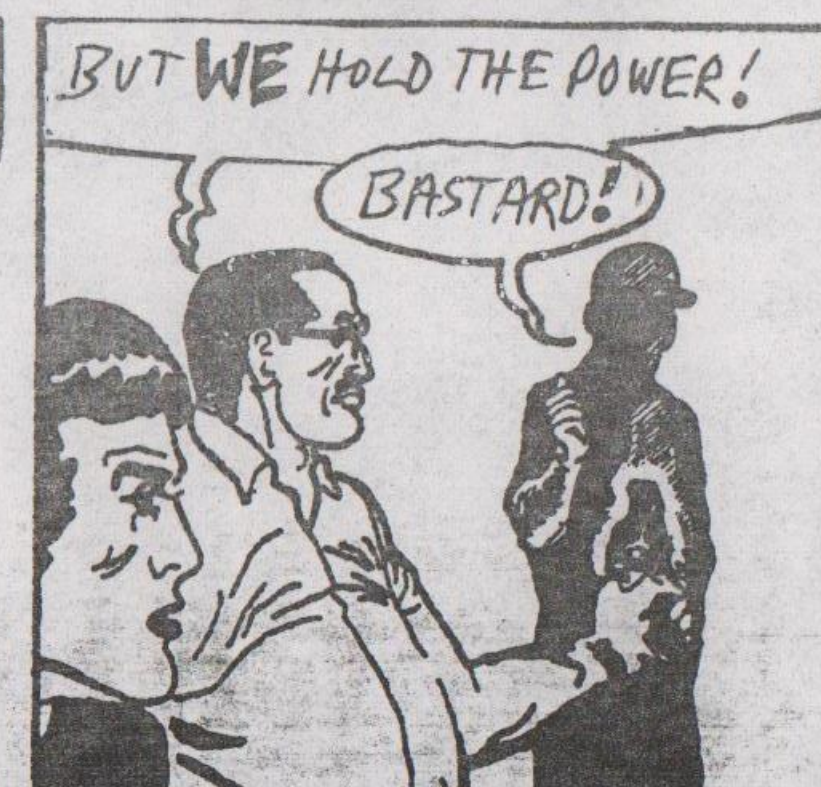
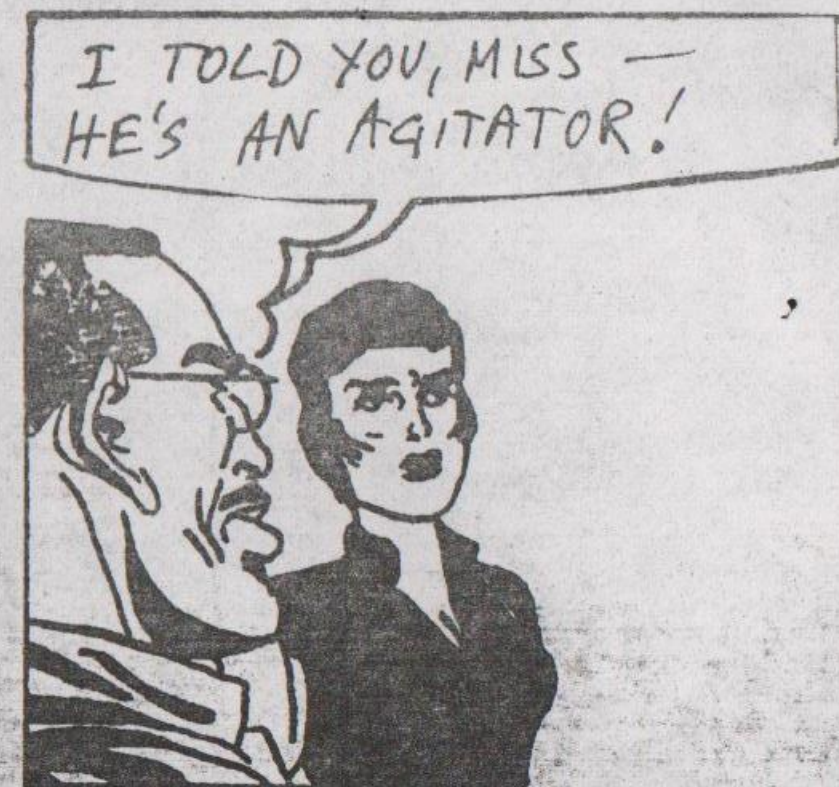
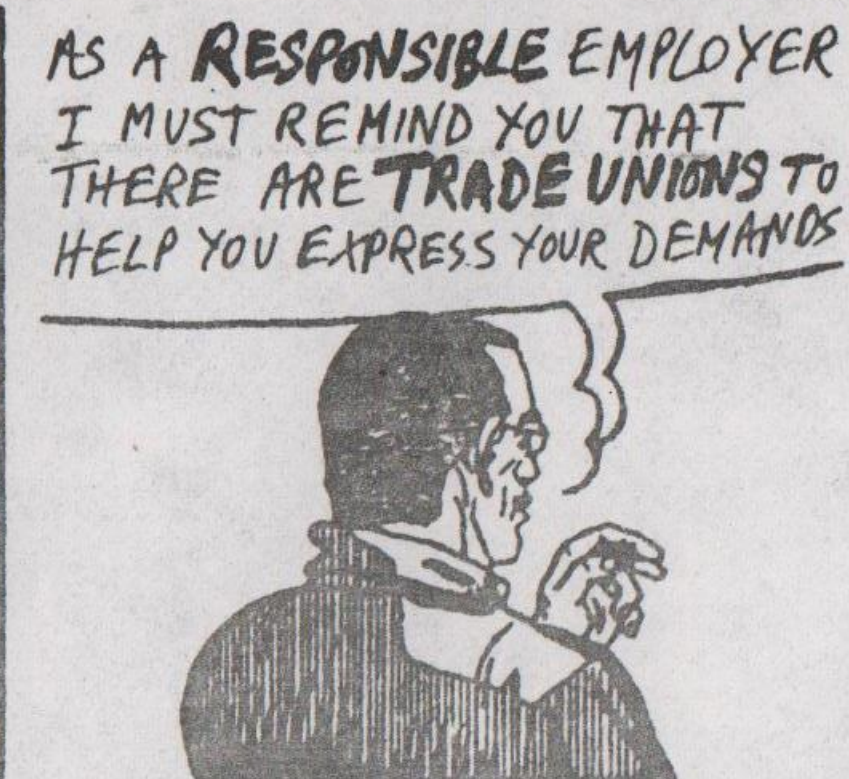
In this rather surprising situation the Occupation Committee had some difficulty even in getting a room: each fiefdom which had set itself up had pretensions on all the offices. A bit discouraged, the majority of the Committee's members disappeared and in despair tried to slip into the various floating sub-committees which at least had the merit of existing. It was obvious that the manipulators referred to above had planned to entrench their power by making the elected Committee mere window-dressing (4). They must have been satisfied with the result of their manoeuvres on the 15th, because when the general assembly met that evening they proposed to renew en bloc the phantom Occupation Committee for another 24 hours. The eight members of the Co-ordination Committee were also confirmed as auxiliaries to the Occupation Committee. Already strengthened by the practical mechanisms at its disposal, the Co-ordination Committee planned to round off its seizure of power by telling the Occupation Committee that it no longer existed. Almost all the members of that Committee, who had reappeared just in time to hear themselves re-elected by the general assembly, had resigned themselves to dispersal. Two members alone tried to appeal to the base to denounce the scandalous manner in which the power of the general assembly had been flouted. Riesel spoke to the occupants in the courtyard, urging them back into the general assembly to repudiate the bureaucrats and support the delegates. A few minutes later the stage was invaded and the bureaucrats called to explain themselves. Publicly confronted with general indignation, they shamefully withdrew. What remained of the Occupation Committee, supported by elements that had suddenly rallied to it, began to exist in reality.

On the same day the workers at the Renault factory at Cléon, in Seine-Maritime, struck and occupied their factory, locking in the management. The Lockheed factory at Beauvais and Unilever in Orléans followed. Later in the evening two or three hundred people arrived at the Odéon Theatre as the audience was leaving and took it over. If the content of this "liberation" remained mostly limited - dominated by people and problems of Culture - the very fact of taking over the building completely outside of the university context was nonetheless an extension of the movement, a farcical enactment of the decomposition of the state power. During the night which followed the most beautiful inscriptions of an era appeared on the walls of the Sorbonne.

On the morning of May 16th the occupation of Renault-Cléon became generally known, and some of the workers of the Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne launched a wildcat to prevent the distribution of newspapers. The Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne, which was meeting in the Jules Bonnet Room (formerly Cavailles) put out the following statement: "Comrades, the Sud-Aviation factory at Nantes has been occupied for two days by the workers and students of that city. The movement was extended today to several factories (NMPP-Paris, Renault-Cléon, etc). The Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne calls for the immediate occupation of all factories in France and the formation of Workers' Councils. Comrades, reproduce and distribute this appeal as quickly as possible."

As has been showed above, the Occupation Committee had been stripped of all means at its disposal for the execution of the slightest activity. To distribute its appeal it set out to reappropriate those means. It could count on the support of

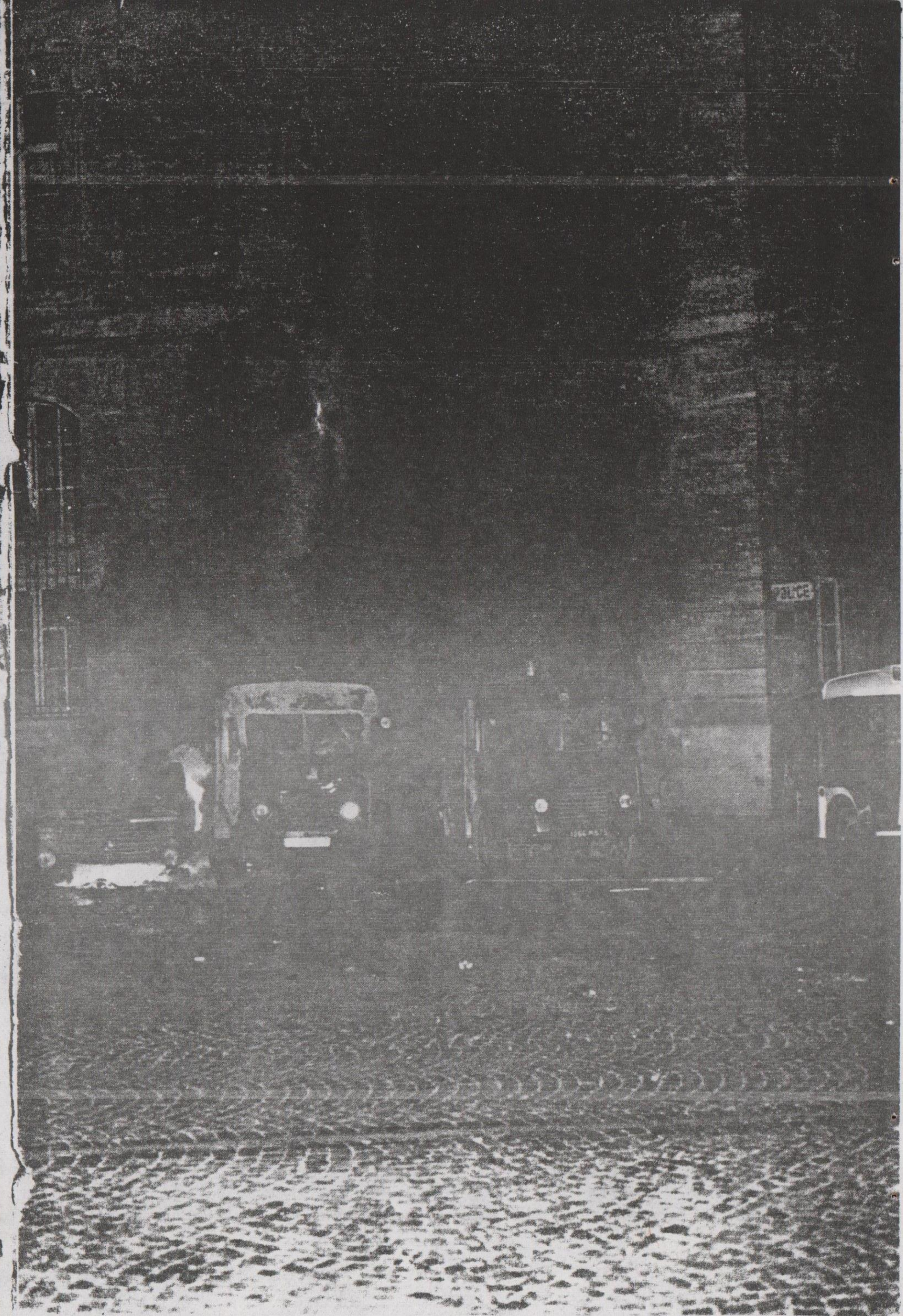




Illustrations: - A councillist comic strip from Toulouse; "Humanity will not be happy...", a contribution by the author to the decor of the Sorbonne; barricades and wrecked police vehicles in Paris; the face of established power - de Gaulle on television; and Guy Debord as a small boy

\*"Humanity will not be happy until the last burocrat is strung up by the guts of the last capitalist"







the Enragés, the Situationists and a dozen other revolutionaries. Using a megaphone from the windows of the Jules Bonnet Room they asked for, and received, numerous volunteers from the courtyard. The text was recopied and went to be read in all the other amphitheatres and faculties. Since the printing had been purposely slowed down by the Inter-Faculty Liaison Committee, the Occupation Committee had to requisition machines and organise its own distribution service. Because the sound crew refused to read the text at regular intervals the Occupation Committee had their equipment seized. The specialists, out of spite, sabotaged their equipment as they were leaving, and partisans of the Committee had to repair it. Telephones were taken over to pass the statement on to press agencies, the provinces and abroad. By 3.30pm it was beginning to be distributed effectively.

The call for the immediate occupation of the factories caused an uproar. Not, of course, among the occupants of the Sorbonne where so many came forward to assure its distribution, but among the placemen of the small leftist groups who showed up, horrified, to speak of adventurism and madness. They were coldly ignored. The Occupation Committee was not about to be called to account by the various leftist cliques. Thus Krivine, the leader of the JCR, was successfully pushed away from the sound equipment and out of the Jules Bonnet Room to which he had come running to express his disapproval, his anxiety and even the ridiculous pretention of cancelling the statement! No matter how much they might have wanted to, the manipulators no longer had the strength to attack the sovereignty of the general assembly with a raid on the Jules Bonnet Room. In fact the Occupation Committee had formed its own security guard since the beginning of the afternoon, to counter any irresponsible use of its shakily established services. It then set about reorganising these by a discussion with the rank and file, easily persuading them of the anti-democratic role that certain elements were trying to put over on them.

The task of reconsolidating the Sorbonne was backed up by a series of tracts, coming out at an increasing rate and widely distributed. They were also read over the sound system, which was announcing new factory occupations as soon as the news arrived. At 4.30pm the tract entitled Vigilance! sounded a warning: "The sovereignty of the general assembly has no meaning unless it exercises its power. For 48 hours the carrying out of the general assembly's decisions has been systematically obstructed... The demand for direct democracy is the least support that revolutionary students can offer revolutionary workers now occupying their factories. It would be unacceptable for the incidents of last night's general assembly to be ignored. The priests are taking over when anti-clerical posters are torn down..." At 5pm the tract Watch out! denounced the Press Committee which "refuses to transmit the statements of the proceedings regularly voted on by the general assembly" and "which is acting as a *committee of censorship*." At 6.30 the tract Watch out for Manipulators and Bureaucrats! denounced the uncontrolled monitors. It emphasised the decisive importance of the general assembly which was to meet that evening: "As the workers begin to occupy several factories in France, *following our example and by the same right as our own*, the Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne announced its support for the movement at 3pm today. The central problem facing the general assembly is therefore to decide by an unequivocal vote whether to support or disavow the appeal of the Occupation Committee. By disavowing it this assembly will assume the responsibility of reserving for students a right it refuses to the working class and will make clear that it has no desire to speak of anything but a Gaullist reform of the university." At 7pm a tract proposed a list of radical slogans to be diffused: "Power to the Workers' Councils", "Down with the Spectacular Commodity Economy", "The End of the University" and so forth.

The whole of this activity, which hourly increased the number of supporters of the Occupation Committee, was cynically falsified by the bourgeois press, following Le Monde of May 18th, which described it in these terms: "No-one is very sure who is running the Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne. In fact the room where this body, elected every night at 8pm, is meeting, was invaded at the end of the afternoon by the 'Enragés' of the 'Situationist International'. In particular they are 'holding' the microphones of the Sorbonne, which allowed them to broadcast sev-

eral slogans during the night, which many students saw as adventurous: 'If you run into a cop, beat the shit out of him', 'Use force to stop photographs being taken inside the Sorbonne'. However the students of the Situationist International have 'dissolved all bureaucratic structures' previously set up, such as the Press Committee and the monitors. The decisions of this Committee may be called into question by the general assembly planned to meet this Friday at 2pm." (5)

The afternoon of the 16th marked the moment when the working class began to declare its support for the movement in an irreversible way. At 2pm the Renault plant at Flins was occupied. Between 3 and 5pm a wildcat took over Renault-Billancourt. Factory occupations began throughout the provinces. The occupation of public buildings, which continued to spread everywhere, hit Sainte-Anne hospital, which was taken over by its personnel.

Confronted by this news, all the leftist groups at the Sorbonne rallied for a march on Billancourt at 8pm. The Occupation Committee decided to delay the meeting of the general assembly, which it was nevertheless impatient to confront with its responsibilities. Its statement, issued just before 8pm, declared: "In agreement with the different political groups, the March 22nd Movement and the UNEF, the Occupation Committee has decided to postpone the meeting of the general assembly from 8pm on May 16th to 2pm on the 17th. Everyone meet this evening at 8pm at Place de la Sorbonne, to march on Billancourt."

The entry of Renault-Billancourt into the struggle, the largest factory in France and one which had so often played a decisive part in social struggles, and particularly the threat of a conjunction of the workers and the revolutionary occupations that had been sparked by the student struggle, horrified the so-called Communist Party and the Government. Even before learning of the plan for a march on Billancourt they reacted almost identically to the bad news they had just received. At 6.30pm a statement from the Stalinist politburo "warned the workers and students against all adventurous calls for action." A little later, after 7pm, a statement was issued by the Government: "In the presence of various attempts called for or set in motion by groups of extremists to provoke general disorder, the Prime Minister wishes to affirm that the Government will not tolerate an attack on the Republic... As soon as the university reform is used only as a pretext for plunging the country into chaos, the Government has the duty of maintaining public order..." The Government at the same time decided to call up 10,000 police reserves.

Three or four thousand occupants of the Sorbonne went in two groups to Billancourt under red and black flags. The CGT, which held every entrance to the factory, successfully prevented any contact with the workers. The UNEF and the SNESup were determined to carry out on the following day the plan to march on the ORTF, which the Enragés-Situationist International Committee had been trying to get adopted by the general assembly since May 14th. When this decision became known the CGT declared at 9am on the 16th that "it looked like a provocation which could only serve personal power." At 10.30 the Stalinist party took the same line. At midnight the SNESup and the UNEF yielded and announced that the plan had been cancelled.

During the night the counter-offensive of the manipulators began at the Sorbonne. Taking advantage of the absence of the revolutionary elements who were out at the Renault factory, they tried to improvise a general assembly with those students who had stayed behind. The Occupation Committee sent in two delegates who denounced the character of an assembly growing out of this specious manoeuvre. Understanding that it had been fooled, the assembly broke up immediately.

At dawn the workers of the NMPP asked the Sorbonne occupants to reinforce their picket lines, which had not yet succeeded in imposing a work stoppage. The Occupation Committee sent volunteers. On the Number 2 line of the Metro an anti-union action committee began a strike of RATP. More than one hundred factories were to be occupied during the day. Early in the morning the workers from the striking Parisian factories, beginning with Renault, began arriving at the Sorbonne to establish the contact which the trades unions were preventing at the factory gates.



The general assembly of 2pm gave priority to a second march on Billancourt, and postponed the discussion of all other questions until the evening session. The FER vainly attempted to invade the stage and its leaders spoke just as vainly to prevent the second march, or, if it had to take place, to have it adopt the quasi-Stalinist slogan "One Worker's Front". The FER doubtless saw itself at the head of such a front, along with the SFIO and the CP. Throughout the crisis the FER was to the Stalinist party what the Stalinists were to Gaullism - support triumphed over apparent rivalry and the same services rendered earned, at their respective levels, the same wage of ingratitude. A statement from CGT-Renault had just appeared "actively discouraging the initiators of this march from maintaining that initiative". The march took place. It was received in the same way as the night before. The CGT had discredited itself even more among the workers by posting the following ridiculous calumny both inside and outside the factory: "Young workers - revolutionary elements are trying to arouse division in our ranks and weaken us. These elements are nothing but henchmen of the bourgeoisie who are receiving large sums from management."

At 1pm the Occupation Committee had printed a tract by the workers who had started the strike at Renault, which explained how young workers had won over the rank and file in various sections, forcing the unions belatedly to endorse the movement they had tried to prevent: "Every night the workers are expecting people to come to the gates to give mass support to a mass movement." At the same time telegrams were sent to several countries, expressing the revolutionary position of the occupied Sorbonne.

When the general assembly finally met at 8pm the conditions which had plagued its functioning from the beginning had not improved. The sound equipment worked only for the time necessary for certain announcements and stopped in the middle of others. The direction of the debates, and especially the final vote, were technically dependent on an unknown buffoon, obviously a UNEF hatchet-man, who had appointed himself president of the general assembly at the beginning of the occupation and who, oblivious to all the denunciations and humiliations heaped upon him, clung to this post until the end. The FER, which had, since that morning, naively publicised its intention to "take charge" of the movement, tried once again to take over the stage. Manipulators from all the sects cooperated to prevent the general assembly from making any pronouncements on the activities of the Occupation Committee which had just asked for a mandate, principally on the call to occupy the factories. This obstruction was accompanied by a campaign of denunciation introducing a number of red herrings: 'The Saint-Germain-des-Prés appearance' of disorder in the building, the contempt shown for the small leftist groups and the UNEF, the commentary on the occupation of Sainte-Anne in which certain people claimed to have heard a call for the 'liberation of the insane', and other miserable topics. The assembly showed itself incapable of self-respect. The ex-Occupation Committee, unable to get a vote on its activities, and having no desire to take part in the power struggles and compromises going on in the various wings around the selection of the new committee, announced that it was leaving the Sorbonne, where direct democracy was being strangled by the bureaucrats. All its supporters left at the same time and the body of monitors found itself dissolved, while the FER, which had been threatening the tribune for more than an hour, seized the occasion to rush in. It was nevertheless unable to take control of the Sorbonne, where the pockets of power were to persist to the end. The verdict of the Occupation Committee was, unfortunately, completely confirmed by the facts.

This collapse of an attempt at direct democracy at the Sorbonne was a defeat for the rest of the occupation movement, which was to experience its main failure precisely in this area. However, at this point of the crisis, it is certain that no group had sufficient strength to intervene in a revolutionary direction with any effect. All the organizations which played any effective role in the further developments were enemies of working class autonomy. Everything was to hang on the power relations in the factories between the workers, everywhere isolated and cut off, and the joint power of the state and the trade unions.

## Footnotes

(1) This was never shown to be true. The hypothesis is supported by two considerations: on the one hand nobody died among so many injured and belatedly treated people; on the other hand it is unlikely that the Government would have resigned itself to the considerable retreat, so full of risks, that it was to undertake that very evening without taking into account specific information on the seriousness of the confrontation. There is no question that a modern state has at its disposal the means of covering up a handful of deaths. Not, of course, by counting them as "missing persons" but, for example, as some argued, by presenting them as victims of car smashes outside Paris.

(2) The author of this work is proud to have written this inscription, controversial at the time, but which opened the way to such fertile activity. (See, on this subject, the magazine International Situationist no. 11, page 32 onwards)

(3) Contact between the SI and the Enragés had begun on the day after the latter's tract appeared, February 21st. Having proved their autonomy, the Enragés could collaborate with the SI, which had always made such autonomy the prerequisite of any working relationship. At the end of the occupations the Committee agreed to pursue this collaboration with the SI.

(4) Some time later an exasperated Peninou spared no agony in wailing his complaints to onlookers: "We had all agreed" he moaned "that no group should participate in the Occupation Committee. We had the agreement of the FER, the JCR, the Maoists, etc. But we had forgotten the Situationists!"

(5) These calumnies had a hard time of it. In Paris-Match of 6th July one could read: "This poetic anarchy did not last. A group called 'The Situationists-Enragés' took power by what might be called 'sectarian legality', and also took over its essential, necessary and sufficient instrument, the sound equipment, a system of loudspeakers through which they were able to pour a torrent of slogans into the corridors and courtyard day and night. Whoever has the sound equipment has the floor and power. The Situationists used the equipment to distribute perfectly ludicrous slogans. For example, they called on all students to 'support the patients of Sainte-Anne in their liberation struggle against the psychiatrists.'" In quite another genre, the book by the fascist Francois Duprat, Les Journées de Mai '68 (Nouvelles Editions Latines) denounced "forty odd students belonging to the Situationist International" as the instigators of the agitation carried on at Nanterre, and claims to see the hand of the HVA (the East German Secret Police) in the activities of the SI. He goes on to lump the Situationists with the March 22nd Movement and to name Cohn-Bendit as their "old friend".



"In France it suffices to be something in order to want to be everything."

Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy Of Right

During the day of May 17th the strike extended to almost the entire metallurgical and chemical industries. Following the example of Renault the workers of Berliet, Rhodiaceta, Rhone-Poulenc and SNECMA decided to occupy their factories. Several railway stations were in the hands of their workers and only a few trains still ran. The postal workers had already taken over the post offices. On the 18th the strike hit Air France and the RATP. Having begun with some exemplary occupations in the provinces, the strike had extended to the Parisian region and then engulfed the entire country. From this moment on even the unions could no longer fool themselves that this chain-reaction of wildcats would not become a general strike.

Spontaneously set in motion, the Occupation Movement had fought from the beginning all orders and control from the unions. "At Renault headquarters" wrote Le Monde on May 18th, "the wildcat nature of the beginning of the movement was underlined after the May 13th strike which had been moderately supported in the provinces. It was seen as equally paradoxical that the centre of the revolt was located precisely in a factory where, at the social level, there had only been routine and relatively minor conflicts."

The depth of the strike limited the unions to a rapid counter-offensive which showed with a brutal clarity their natural function as guardians of capitalism in the factories. The trade union strategy had a single goal: to defeat the strike. In order to do this the unions, with a long strike-breaking tradition, set out to reduce a vast general strike to a series of isolated strikes at the individual enterprise level. The CGT led the counter-offensive. Beginning on May 17th, its Central Council met and declared: "The action undertaken *on the initiative of the CGT and with the other trade union organisations* has created a new situation and has taken on an exceptional importance." (This incredible lie is emphasised by the author) The strike was thus accepted but only to refuse any call for a general strike. Nevertheless, the workers everywhere voted for an unlimited strike and occupation of the factories. In order to take over a movement that threatened them directly the bureaucratic organisations had first to curb the workers' initiatives and face the growing autonomy of the proletariat. They therefore took over the strike committees, which immediately became veritable police powers charged with *isolating* the workers in the factories and formulating their own demands in the name of the workers.

While the picket lines at virtually all the factory gates, still under union orders, prevented the workers from speaking for themselves or to anyone else, and from hearing the most radical currents then coming to the fore, the union leadership assumed the task of reducing the movement to a program of strictly professional demands. The spectacle of bureaucratic opposition reached the point of parody when the newly de-Christianised CFDT attacked the CGT, which it rightly accused of limiting itself to wage demands, and proclaimed that "...beyond mere material demands it is the problem of management and control of the enterprise which has been posed." This electoral bid by a modernist trade union went so far as to propose "self management" as the form of "workers' power in the enterprise." This was followed by the spectacle of the two major guardians of false consciousness taking over the truth of their own lies: Seguy, the Stalinist, attacking self-management as an "empty formula" and Descamps, the priest, emptying it of its real content. In fact this quarrel of the ancients and the moderns over the best form of defence for bureaucratic capitalism was only a prelude to their fundamental agreement on the necessity for negotiations with the state and management.

On Monday May 20th the strike and occupations became general, with the exception of

just a few sectors which would shortly join the movement. There were by now 6 million strikers. There would be ten million in the days to follow. The CGT and the Communist Party, outflanked on every side, denounced any idea of an "insurrectionary strike", while pretending to stiffen their demands. Seguy declared that his "delegates were ready for eventual negotiations". For the unions the only use of all the revolutionary strength of the proletariat was to make themselves presentable in the eyes of an effectively dispossessed management and a practically non-existent Government.

The same comedy was being played out at the political level. On May 22nd the motion of censure was defeated amidst general indifference. There was more going on in the factories and streets than in all the meetings of Parliament and the parties. The CGT called for a "day of demands" on Friday 24th. But in the meantime the attempt to expel Cohn-Bendit from the country brought the struggle back into the streets. A protest demonstration was improvised to prepare for the one on Friday. The CGT parade, which began at 2pm, was concluded in calm by a particularly senile broadcast by de Gaulle.

Nonetheless, at the same time, thousands of demonstrators had decided to defy both the police and the student monitors. The massive participation of workers in the demonstration condemned by the CP and the CGT showed, negatively, to what extent those two organisations could offer only the spectacle of a strength which no longer belonged to them. In the same way the leader of the March 22nd Movement was able, by his enforced absence, to start an agitation that he would have been unable to restrain.

Some 30,000 demonstrators had gathered between Gare de Lyon and the Bastille. They set off to march to the Hôtel de Ville. But the police, obviously, had already blocked off all exits. The first barricade went up immediately. It was the signal for a series of confrontations that went on until dawn. Some of the demonstrators were able to break through to the Stock Exchange and sack it. The fire, which would have fulfilled the dreams of generations of revolutionaries, did only superficial damage to the "Temple of Capital". Several groups had spread out into the areas around the Stock Exchange, Les Halles and the Bastille, and were moving out towards Nation. Others had made the Left Bank and were holding the Latin Quarter and Saint-Germain-des-Prés, before moving in the direction of Denfert-Rochereau. The violence reached its peak (1). It had long since ceased to be the monopoly of "students" and had become the privilege of the proletariat. The police stations at Odéon and in the Rue Beaubourg were enthusiastically sacked. Before the eyes of the impotent police, two paddy-wagons and a police car were fired with Molotov cocktails in front of the Panthéon police station.

At the same time several thousand rioters in Lyon were fighting the police, crushing one commissioner under a runaway truck loaded with stones, and surpassing their Parisian comrades by organising the looting of a department store. There were battles at Bordeaux, where the police retreated, in Nantes, and even in Strassbourg.

Thus the workers entered the struggle, not only against their unions, but moreover in sympathy with a movement of students, and, better still, of thugs and vandals defending absolutely scandalous slogans ranging from "I come in the paving stones" ("Je jouis dans les pavés") to "Never Work". None of the workers who left the factories to find the revolutionaries and work out a basis of agreement with them ever expressed any reservations about this extreme aspect of the movement. Quite the contrary: the workers didn't hesitate to build barricades, sack police stations, burn cars, and turn the Boulevard Saint-Michel into a vast garden side by side with those Fouchet and the so-called Communist Party would the following day call the "scum".

On the 25th the Government and the bureaucratic organisations made a joint response to this insurrectionary prelude which made them tremble. Their responses were complementary: both of them called for a ban on demonstrations and for immediate negotiations. Each of them made the decision that the other had hoped for.



## Footnote

(1) The death of one of the demonstrators was later admitted. Much use was made of the unfortunate victim: first it was announced that she had fallen from a roof, then that she had been knifed while fighting against the scum in the demonstration. Finally, the report of a medical expert, which was divulged a few weeks later, concluded that she had been killed by a grenade explosion.

"It was a festival without a beginning or an end; I saw everyone and no-one, for each individual was lost in the same enormous strolling crowd; I spoke to everyone without remembering either my own words or those spoken by others, because everyone's attention was absorbed at every step by new objects and events, and by unexpected news."

Bakunin, Confession

The Occupation Movement, which had taken over the key sectors of the economy, very rapidly reached every sector of social life, attacking all the control points of capitalism and bureaucracy. The fact that the strike had now extended to activities which had always escaped subversion in the past radically affirmed two of the oldest assertions of the Situationist analysis: that the increasing modernisation of capitalism brings with it the proletarianisation of an ever-increasing part of the population, and that as the world of commodities extends its power to all aspects of life, it produces everywhere an extension and deepening of the forces that negate it.

The violence of the negative was such that it not only brought the reserves into battle, side by side with the shock troops, but it also allowed the rabble whose task it was to reinforce the positivity of the dominant world to permit themselves a kind of opposition. Thus the parallel development of real struggles and their caricature was seen at every level and every moment. The action unleashed by the students in the universities and the streets was extended from the start to the high schools. Despite some student-unionist illusions in the High School Action Committees (CAL), the high school students proved by their fighting abilities and their consciousness that they presaged not so much a future generation of students as the grave-diggers of the university itself. Far more than the university professors, the high school teachers knew how to learn from their students. They overwhelmingly supported the strike, despite the very firm position taken by the school officials. By occupying their workplaces the employees of banks, insurance companies and department stores had simultaneously protested against their proletarian condition and against a system of services which makes everyone a slave of the system. In the same way the strikers of the ORTF, despite a belief in "objective news", had vaguely perceived their reification and grasped the fundamentally perverted character of all communication in which hierarchy is present. The wave of solidarity which swept up the exploited in their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The students at the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts took over the buildings and participated massively in the most dynamic phases of the movement. Those from the Conservatory of Music issued a tract calling for a "wild and ephemeral" music and announced that "our demands be accepted within a given time or revolution will follow". They rediscovered the *Congolese* tone that the Lumumbists and Muletists had popularised at the very moment when the working classes of the industrialised countries were beginning to experiment with the possibilities of their own independence, and which expresses so well what all power fears - the naive spontaneity of people awakening to political consciousness. In the same way the catch-phrase "We are all German Jews", ridiculous in itself, took on a truly disturbing significance in the mouths of Arabs at the Bastille who were chanting it on the 24th, because every one of them was thinking that it would be necessary to avenge the massacre of October 1961, and that no diversion on the theme of the Arab-Israeli War would prevent it. Although nothing followed from it, the seizure of the ocean liner *France* by its crew, outside Le Havre, had the merit of reminding those who were now mulling over the possibilities of a revolution that the gestures of the sailors of Odessa, Kronstadt and Keil did not belong to the past. The uncommon was becoming an everyday occurrence in the same way that everyday life was opening up to unbelievable possibilities of change. The researchers of the Meudon Observatory placed astronomical observation under workers' control. The national presses were on strike. The grave-diggers occupied the cemeteries. The football players kicked



out the managers from their federation and put out a tract calling for "Football to the football players". The old mole spared nothing - neither the old privileged groups nor the new ones. The interns and young doctors had liquidated the fiefdom which reigned in their profession, spat on the "directors" before kicking them out, declared their opposition to *L'Ordre des Médecins* and put the old conceptions of medicine on trial. The "oppositional managers" went so far as to question their own authority, the negative privilege of consuming more and living less. Even the ad-men followed the example of proletarians demanding the end of the proletariat, by demanding an end to advertising.

The obvious longing for a real change cast all the more light on the dirisive and disgusting manoeuvres of the falsifiers, of those who make a living by dressing the old world in new clothes. If the priests were able to get away without having their churches collapse on them it was only because revolutionary spontaneity - which in Spain in 1936 had known how to make proper use of religious buildings - still wore the yoke of Stalino-Guevarism. Because of that it was no surprise to see the synagogues, temples and churches converted to "opposition centres" to serve up the old mystifications in the sauce of the day with the blessing of those who have been handing out modernist soup for half a century. Since people were tolerating occupied consistories and Leninist theologians it became difficult to snuff out in their own arrogance museum directors calling for the reorganisation of their warehouses, writers reserving the Hôtel de Massa (which had seen writers before) for the nightwatchmen of the cultural elite, filmmakers recuperating on film what insurrectionary violence would not have time to destroy, and, finally, artists dragging out the old host of "revolutionary art".

Nonetheless, in the space of a week, millions of people had broken with the weight of alienating conditions, the routine of survival, ideological falsification and the inverted world of the spectacle. For the first time since the Commune of 1871, and with a far more promising future, the real individual was absorbing the abstract citizen into his life, his work and his individual relationships, becoming a species-being and thereby recognising his own powers as social powers. The festival finally gave real holidays to people who had only known working days and leaves of absence. The hierarchical pyramid had melted like a lump of sugar in the May sun. People spoke and understood each other in half a word. There were no more intellectuals or workers, but simply revolutionaries engaged in a universal dialog generalising a communication from which only "proletarian" intellectuals and other candidates for leadership felt themselves excluded. In this context the word "comrade" regained its authentic meaning, truly marking the end of separations. And those who had used it in a Stalinist mode quickly learned that to speak the language of wolves only gave them away more quickly as watchdogs. The streets belonged to those who were digging them up.

Everyday life, suddenly rediscovered, became the centre of all possible conquests. People who had lived their whole lives in offices declared that they could no longer live in the way they had before, not even a little better than before. It was obvious in the dawning revolution that from then on there would be no renunciations, only tactical retreats. When the Odéon was occupied the administrative director withdrew to the back of the stage. After the initial surprise he took two steps forward and cried out "Now that you've taken it, keep it, never give it back, burn it first!" And the fact that the Odéon, momentarily in the hands of its cultural galley-slaves, did not burn, shows only that we have just tasted the first fruits.

Capitalised time stopped. Without any trains, tubes, cars or work the strikers recaptured the time so sadly lost in factories, on motorways and in front of the tv. People strolled, dreamed, learned how to live. Desires began to become, little by little, reality. For the first time youth really existed. Not the social category invented for the needs of the commodity economy by sociologists and economists, but the only real youth of life lived without dead time, which rejects for the sake of intensity a repressive reference to age. "Long live the Ephemeral! (Marxist-Pessimist Youth)" read one inscription. Radical theory, reputed to be so difficult by the intellectuals who were unable to live it, became tangible for all those who

felt it in their slightest gestures of refusal, which is why they had no trouble putting on the walls the theoretical formulation of what they longed to live. One night on the barricades was all the *blousons noirs* needed to become politicised and reach perfect agreement with the most advanced faction of the Occupation Movement.

The technical aid of the occupied printing presses was added to the objective conditions, foreseen by the SI, and naturally giving a boost to the propagation of the situationist theses. Certain printers were among the rare strikers (1), surpassing the sterile stage of passive occupation, who decided to give practical support to those doing the fighting. Tracts and posters calling for the formation of Workers' Councils thus went through numerous printings. The printers' action followed a clear awareness of the need facing the movement to put the instruments of production and centres of consumption at the service of all strikers, but also arose from a class solidarity that took an exemplary form among other workers. The personnel of the Schlumberger factory immediately stated that its demands "had nothing to do with wages", and went on to strike in support of the particularly badly exploited workers at the nearby Danone factory. The employees of the FNAC similarly declared in a tract that "We, the workers of the FNAC stores, have gone on strike not for the satisfaction of our particular demands but to participate in the movement which has currently mobilised ten million intellectual and manual workers..."

The reflex of internationalism, which the specialists of peaceful coexistence and exotic guerrillas had prematurely buried in oblivion or funeral orations for the stupid Régis Debray, reappeared with a strength which augers an early return of the International Brigades. At the same time the whole spectacle of foreign policy, with Vietnam in the lead, had suddenly dissolved, revealing itself for what it was always: a phoney problem for a phoney opposition. There was applause for the seizure of Bumidom by the Antillais, the occupations of the international dormitories of the university. Rarely had so many national flags been burned by so many foreigners resolved on finishing for once and for all with the symbols of the state before finishing with the state itself. The French Government knew how to answer this internationalism, turning over to the prisons of every country the Spaniards, Iranians, Tunisians, Portuguese, Africans and all those who had dreamed in France of a freedom forbidden in their homelands.

All the chatter about partial demands could never efface a single moment of the freedom that was lived. In a few days the certainty of possible global change had reached the point of no return. Hierarchical organisation, hit at its economic foundations, ceased to appear as inevitable. The refusal of leaders and monitors, like the struggle against the state and its police, had first become a reality in the workplaces, where employers and managers at every level had been chased off. Even the presence of managerial apprentices, the men of the trade unions and parties could not efface from the minds of the revolutionaries that what had been done with the greatest passion had been done without leaders, and therefore against them. The term "Stalinist" was thus recognised by everyone as the worst insult in the political spectrum.

The work-stoppage, as the essential phase of a movement that was hardly unaware of its insurrectionary character, reminded everyone of the primordial banality that alienated work produces alienation. The right to idleness was affirmed not only in popular slogans like "Never Work" or "Live Without Dead Time, Indulge Untrammelled Desire", but particularly in the unleashing of playful activity. Fourier had already remarked how it took workers several hours to put up a barricade that rioters could erect in a few minutes. The disappearance of forced labour necessarily coincided with the free flow of creativity in every sphere: slogans, language, behaviour, tactics, street-fighting techniques, agitation, songs and comic strips. Everyone was thus able to measure the amount of creative energy that had been crushed during the time of survival, the days condemned to output, shopping, television, and to passivity erected as a principle. People used the same geiger-counter to evaluate the drabness of the leisure factories where they paid to consume in utter boredom commodities produced with a weariness that gives leisure its attraction.



"Underneath the paving stones, the beach!" joyously proclaimed one mural poet, while a letter apparently signed by the CNPF cynically advised the workers to forget the factory occupations and to take advantage of their wage increases by spending their holidays at the Club Méditerranée.

The commodity system was undoubtedly the target of the aggressiveness shown by the masses. While there was little looting, many storefront windows were submitted to the critique of the paving stone. The Situationists had foreseen for years that the permanent incitement to make use of the widest possible variety of items in an insidious monetary exchange would one day provoke the anger of the masses of people abused and treated as passive consumers for too long. Cars, which concentrated the alienation of work and leisure, mechanical boredom, difficulty of movement and the permanent bad tempers of their owners, now attracted only the match (It is quite surprising to find the liberals, usually so quick to denounce violence, reluctant to applaud a healthy gesture saving from death the large numbers of people mangled every day on the roads). The shortage of money caused by the closing of the banks was felt not as a nuisance, but as an easing of human relationships. Towards the end of May people began to talk about the disappearance of money. A real solidarity smoothed over the differences between individual situations. Free food was distributed in many places by the strikers. Moreover, everyone was aware that in the event of a long strike it would be necessary to begin requisitions, and so to usher in a period of real affluence.

This way of seizing things at the root was truly realised theory and the practical refusal of ideology. To such an extent that those who were acting in so radical a fashion were doubly enabled to denounce the distortion of the real carried out in the palace of mirrors of the bureaucratic structures struggling to impose their own reflection everywhere. They fought for the most advanced objectives of the revolutionary project and were thus able to speak in the name of everyone and from real knowledge. They were most keenly aware of the distance between the practice at the base and the ideas of the leaders. From the first assemblies in the Sorbonne, those who claimed to speak in the name of a traditional group and specialised politics found themselves roundly booed and unable to utter a word. The people who had fought on the barricades never felt compelled to explain, through confirmed or potential bureaucrats, who they were fighting for. They knew perfectly well, from the pleasure they took in combat, that they were fighting for themselves, and that was all they needed. They were the motor force of the revolution, which no apparatus can tolerate. It was against them that the principle brakes were applied.

The critique of everyday life successfully began to modify the landscape of alienation. The Rue Gay-Lussac was named the Rue du 11 Mai, red and black flags gave a human appearance to the fronts of public buildings. The Haussmannian perspective of the boulevards was corrected and the green belts redistributed and closed to traffic. Everyone, in his own way, made his own critique of urbanism. As for the critique of the artistic project, it was not to be found among the travelling salesmen of the happenings or the cold leftovers of the avant garde, but in the streets, on the walls, and in the general movement of emancipation which carried within itself even the realisation of art. Doctors, so often attached to the defence of corporate interests, passed into the camp of the revolution with a denunciation of the police functions forced upon them: "Capitalist society, under the cover of apparent neutrality (liberalism, medical vocation, non-combattant humanism) has put the doctor on the side of repression: he is charged with keeping the population fit for work and consumption (eg. industrial medicine) and with making people accept a society that makes them sick (eg. psychiatry)" (2). It was the honour of the interns and nurses of the Sainte-Anne psychiatric hospital to denounce in practice that nightmare universe by occupying the buildings, chasing off the excrement whose demise Breton dreamed of, and taking into the Occupation Committee representatives of the so-called patients.

Rarely had anyone seen so many people question so many platitudes, and undoubtedly it will one day be necessary to affirm that in May 1968 a sense of profound earthquakes preceded the real transformation of the world and of life. A manifestly Councilist attitude had thus preceded the appearance of councils everywhere. But

what the new recruits of the new proletariat can accomplish will be done even better by the workers once they get out of the cages where they are kept by the monkeys of trade-unionism: that is to say, soon, if one keeps in mind slogans such as "Lynch Seguy".

The formation of Action Committees by the base was a distinctive and positive sign of the movement. Nonetheless it contained most of the obstacles which led to its collapse. The committees originated in a profound desire to escape bureaucratic manipulations and to begin independent action at the base in the framework of general subversion. Thus the Action Committees formed in the Rhône-Poulenc factories in the NMPP and in certain stores, to cite only a few, were able from the beginning to launch and consolidate the strike against all the manoeuvres of the unions. This was also the case with the "Worker-Student" Action Committees, which were able to accelerate the extension and support of the strike. Nevertheless, because they were pushed by "militants", the form of these committees suffered from their impoverished origins. Most of them were easy game for the specialists of infiltration: they let themselves be paralysed by sectarian quarrels, which could only discourage naive people with good intentions. Many committees disappeared in this way. Others nauseated the workers with their eclecticism and ideology. Without any direct relationship to real struggles, the formation was a bastardised by-product of revolutionary action, giving rise to all sorts of caricatures and recuperations (Odéon Action Committee, Writers' Action Committee, etc.).

The working class spontaneously realised what no trade union or party could do or wanted to do for it: it had launched the strike and occupied the factories. It had done the essential, without which nothing would have been possible, but it did nothing more, and thus gave outside forces the chance to dispossess it and speak in its name. Stalinism played its most brilliant role since Budapest. The so-called Communist Party and its trade union annex constituted the main counter-revolutionary force holding back the movement. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the social democrats could have fought so effectively. It was precisely because the CGT had the most powerful organisation and could administer the largest dose of illusions that it appeared all the more obviously as the major enemy of the strike. In fact all the unions pursued the same goal. None of them, however, attained the poetry of l'Humanité, which ran the indignant headline: "Government and Employers Prolong Strike" (3).

In modern capitalist society the trade unions are neither degenerated working class organisations nor revolutionary ones betrayed by bureaucratic leaders, but are mechanisms for the integration of the proletariat into the system of exploitation. Reformist in its essence, the trade union, regardless of the political content of the bureaucracy which runs it, remains the most effective support for the bourgeoisie turned reformist in its own right. (This was perfectly demonstrated by the socialist unions in the sabotage of the great Belgian wildcat strike of 1960 - 61). It is the principle obstacle between the proletariat and total emancipation. From now on any revolt by the working class will be made against its own unions. It was this elementary truth that the neo-Bolsheviks refused to recognise.

Thus, even while calling for revolution, they remained on counter-revolutionary ground: Trotskyists and Maoists of every sauce have always defined themselves in relation to official Stalinism. By that very fact they helped to nourish the illusions of the proletariat about the Communist Party and the trade unions. Thus it was no surprise to hear them once more denouncing as a betrayal what was nothing but the natural conduct of a bureaucracy. Behind their defence of "more revolutionary" unions was the secret dream of one day infiltrating them. Not only because they could not see what was modern but because they insisted on repeating the errors of the past: they constitute the bad memory of the proletariat by reviving all the failed revolutions of our era, from 1917 to the peasant-bureaucratic revolutions of China and Cuba. The strength of their anti-historical inertia weighed heavily in the scales of counter-revolution, and their ideological prose helped to falsify the real dialogs that were beginning everywhere.

But all these objective obstacles, external to the action and consciousness of the working class, would not have survived the first factory occupation if the prole-



proletariat's own subjective obstacles were not already there. The revolutionary current that mobilised millions of workers in a few days had come a long way. Decades of counter-revolutionary history are not borne with impunity. Something always remains, and this time it was the backwardness of theoretical consciousness that had the greatest consequences. Consumer alienation, spectacular passivity and organised separation have been the major accomplishments of modern affluence. It was these aspects which were first of all challenged by the May uprising, but it was the hidden side of the very consciousness of people which saved the old world. The workers entered the struggle spontaneously, armed only with their subjectivity in revolt. The depth and violence of the revolt was their immediate reply to the unbearable dominant order. But in the last analysis the revolutionary mass did not have the time for an exact and real consciousness of what it was doing. And it is this inadequate relation between theory and practice which remains the fundamental trait of proletarian revolutions which fail. Historical consciousness is an essential condition of social revolution. Of course, conscious groups grasped the deeper meaning of the movement and understood its development, and it was they who acted with the most radicalism and effect. For it was not radical ideas that were lacking, but a *coherent and organised theory*.

Those who spoke of Marcuse as the "theoretician" of the movement didn't know what they were talking about. They didn't understand the movement itself, let alone Marcuse. Marcusean ideology, already ridiculous, was pasted onto the movement in the same way that Geismar, Sauvegeot and Cohn-Bendit had been "designated" to represent it. But even they confessed an ignorance of Marcuse (4). In reality, if the revolutionary crisis of May showed anything it was precisely the opposite of Marcuse's theses: that the proletariat had *not* been integrated, and is the major revolutionary force in modern society. Pessimists and sociologists have to do their homework again, along with the mouthpieces of underdevelopment, Black Power and Dutschkeism.

It was also this theoretical backwardness that gave rise to all those practical weaknesses that paralysed the struggle. If the principle of private property, the basis of bourgeois society, was everywhere trampled upon, those who dared to go all the way were very rare. The refusal to loot was only a detail: nowhere did the workers go on to distribute the commodities in the big stores. The reopening of certain sectors of production and distribution for the use of the strikers was never attempted, despite some isolated calls in favour of such a perspective. In fact such an undertaking already presupposed another form of proletarian organisation than those of the trade union police. And it was this autonomous form that was so cruelly lacking.

If the proletariat cannot organise itself in a revolutionary way it cannot win. The Trotskyist moans about the absence of a "Vanguard Organisation" are an inversion of the historical project of the emancipation of the proletariat. The accession of the working class to historical consciousness will be the task of the workers themselves, and that will be possible only through an autonomous organisation. The form of the Council remains the means and goal of total emancipation.

It was these subjective obstacles, that prevented the working class speaking for itself and which let the phrase specialists, who were most directly responsible for those obstacles, go on pontificating. But wherever they encountered radical theory they suffered. Never had so many people, with such justification, been treated as rabble: aside from the official spokesmen of Stalinism, it was the Axeloses, the Godards, the Châtelets, the Morins (5) and the Lapassades who found themselves insulted and chased off, in the amphitheatres and streets, when they turned up to pursue their careers. It is certain that these reptiles took no chances of dying from embarrassment. They awaited their hour, the defeat of the Occupation Movement, to take up the old numbers once again. In the program of the ridiculous "Summer University", (*Le Monde*, July 3rd), we found, once again, Lapassade on self-management, Lyotard and Châtelet on contemporary Philosophy and Godard, Sartre and Butor on its "Support Committee".

Obviously, all those who had been obstacles to the revolutionary transformation of the world had not been transformed one bit. Just as unshakable as the Stalinists,

who had nothing to say about an ominous movement except that it had cost them the elections, the Leninists of the Trotskyist groups saw it only as a confirmation of their thesis on the lack of the vanguard party. As for the mob of spectators, they collected or sold off the revolutionary publications, and ran to buy posters blown up from photographs of the barricades.

#### Footnotes

(1) A factory in the western suburbs made walkie-talkie radios for the use of the demonstrators. The post office employees in several cities assured communications for the strikers.

(2) From *Medicine and Repression*, a text put out by the National Centre of Young Doctors.

(3) A tract issued on June 8th, quoted in ICO No. 72, signed by the delegate of a Swedish worker-student solidarity committee in Göteborg, reported that Tomasi, the CGT representative at Renault, refused their contribution, arguing that "the current strike is a *French affair* and doesn't concern other countries, that the French workers were quite evolved and therefore lacked nothing, especially money... that the present crisis was in no way revolutionary, that the only issues were the 'demands', that the running of the factories by the workers themselves was a romantic idea unrelated to the French situation, and that the strike was the result of long years of quiet and patient work by the trade unions, and, finally, that small groups of *infiltrators* were unfortunately trying to turn the workers against their own leaders by persuading them that the unions had followed the workers into the strike and not the other way round."

(4) Although they have in fact read very little, these intellectual recuperators do not shrink from hiding their reading in order to pose as pure men of action. By postulating an independence that would come from action they hope it will be forgotten that they were only publicity's puppets in a *represented* action. What other conclusions could be drawn from the cynical declaration of Geismar in *La Revolte Etudiante*, (Editions de Seuil): "Perhaps in twenty years, if we succeed in building a new society and a new university within that society, historians and ideologists will discover the creative sources of what is going to happen in a handful of little works and pamphlets written by philosophers and other men, but I think for the time being these sources are unimportant." The clumsy Geismar can take off his moustache. He has been recognised!

(5) This swine is going to far. In his idiotic book, *Mai 1968: la Breche*, he doesn't shrink from accusing the Situationists of ganging up "several against one" in some fights. The lie is definitely a profession with this former contributor to *Arguments*. He nonetheless should know that a single Situationist could chase him all the way to Versailles, or even Plodemet.



## CULMINATION

"Let us conclude: those who are unable to change methods when the times demand it doubtlessly prosper as long as they remain in step with fortune; but they are lost as soon as fortune changes. As for the rest I think it is better to be too bold than too cautious..."

Machiavelli, The Prince

On the morning of May 27th Seguy went to announce to the workers at Renault-Billancourt the agreement concluded between the unions, the Government and the employers. The workers unanimously shouted down the bureaucrat, who, as his whole speech showed, had come in hopes of having himself acclaimed for these results. Confronted with the anger of the rank and file, the Stalinists suddenly took shelter behind a detail which had been suppressed up to that point, and which was in fact essential - nothing would be signed without the ratification of the workers. Since the workers had rejected the agreement the strike and negotiations would go on. Following Renault, all sectors rejected the crumbs with which the bourgeoisie and its auxiliaries thought they could purchase the resumption of work.

The content of the "Grenelle Agreement" certainly had little enough to arouse the enthusiasm of the working masses who knew they were virtually masters of production, which they had paralysed for ten days. The agreements raised wages by 7% and lifted the guaranteed minimum wage (SMIG - the legal Salaire Minimum Integrale Garantie) from 2.22 to 3.00 Francs. This would mean that the most exploited sector of the working class, particularly in the provinces, which was making 348.80 Francs per month would now have a purchasing power more suited to the "affluent society" - 520 Francs a month. The days lost in the strike would not be paid until they were made up in overtime. This tip would already be a heavy burden on the normal functioning of the French economy, especially in its obligations to the Common Market and other aspects of international capitalist competition. All the workers knew that such "benefits" would be taken back in kind in imminent price rises. They felt that it would be much more expedient to sweep away the system which had already conceded all it could, and to organise society on a new basis. The fall of the Gaullist regime was necessarily the prerequisite for this reversal of perspective.

The Stalinists understood how dangerous the situation was. Despite their constant support, the Government had just failed once more to reestablish itself. After the failure of Pompidou on May 11th, of his attempt to check the crisis by sacrificing his authority in the domain of the university, a speech by de Gaulle and the hastily concluded agreement between Pompidou and the unions had failed to circumvent a crisis that had become profoundly social. The Stalinists began to despair of the survival of Gaullism, since they had been unable to save it up to then, and because Gaullism seemed to have lost the elasticity essential to its survival. They found themselves obliged, much to their regret, to run the risk of being in the other camp where they had always claimed to stand. On May 28th and 29th they gambled all on the fall of Gaullism. They had come to terms with many pressures, mainly those of the workers, and subsequently of those oppositional elements who began clamouring for the replacement of Gaullism and thus could have been joined by those who first and foremost wanted the regime to fall. These included the Christian trade unionists of the CFDT, Mendès-France, the dim-witted Mitterand's "Federation", as well as the crowd that turned out at Charléty stadium for the formation of an ultra-leftist bureaucratic organisation (1). All these dreamers were raising their voices only in the name of the supposed forces that the Stalinists would put into play to open the way for *their brand* of post-Gaullism, mutterings which events immediately revealed as ridiculous.

The Stalinists were much more realistic. They resigned themselves to asking for a "popular government" in the powerful and numerous demonstrations staged by the CGT on the 29th, and already were preparing to defend it. They knew perfectly well that such a government would only be a dangerous last resort. While they were still

able to help defeat the revolutionary movement before it succeeded in overthrowing Gaullism, they rightly feared that they would be unable to defeat it afterwards. Already, on May 28th, an editorial broadcast on the radio contended, with a premature pessimism, that "the French Communist Party would never rise again", and that the principal danger now lay with "situationist leftists".

On May 30th a speech by de Gaulle, firmly underlined his intention to stay in power, whatever the price. He offered the choice between the coming elections or immediate civil war. Trusted regiments were deployed around Paris and abundantly photographed. The overjoyed Stalinists had no trouble restraining themselves from calling for an extension of the strike to bring down the regime. They eagerly rallied to the Gaullist elections, no matter what the price would be to themselves.

In such conditions the alternatives were irrevocably posed: the autonomous affirmation of the proletariat, or the complete defeat of the movement - a revolution of the Councils or the Grenelle Agreement. The revolutionary movement could not settle accounts with the French Communist Party without first throwing out de Gaulle. The form of workers' power which would have been developed in the post-Gaullist phase of the crisis, being blocked by both the old State reaffirmed and the Communist Party, no longer had any hope of reversing its approaching defeat.

## Footnote

(1) It was to the credit of the Cohn-Bendit faction of the March 22nd Movement that they refused the advances of the renegade Stalinist Barjonet and other oecumenical leftist smalltimers. It goes without saying that the Situationists, for their part, responded only with contempt (See the Address to All Workers by the Comité pour le Maintien des Occupations)



# 8 THE "COUNCIL FOR THE CONTINUATION OF OCCUPATIONS" (CMDO) AND COUNCILLIST TENDENCIES

"This explosion was provoked by groups in revolt against modern consumer and technical society, whether it be the Communism of the east or the capitalism of the west. They are groups, moreover, who have no idea what they would replace it with, but who delight in negation, destruction, violence, anarchy and who brandish the black flag!"

de Gaulle, televised speech of June 7th, 1968

The "Council for the Continuation of Occupations" was formed on the evening of May 17th by those supporters of the first Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne who had left with it and who proposed to uphold for the rest of the crisis the program of Council Democracy which was inseparable from a quantitative and qualitative expansion of the Occupation Movement.

About 40 people made up the permanent base of the CMDO, and they were joined for a while by other revolutionaries and strikers coming from various industries, from the provinces or from abroad, and returning there. The CMDO was more or less constantly made up of about ten Situationists and Enragés (among them Debord, Khayati, Riesel and Vaneigem) and as many from the workers, the high school students or "students", and other councillists without specific social functions.

Throughout its existence the CMDO was a successful experiment in direct democracy, guaranteed by an equal participation of everyone in debates, decisions and their execution. It was essentially an uninterrupted general assembly deliberating day and night. No faction or private meetings ever existed outside the common debate.

A unit spontaneously created in the conditions of a revolutionary moment, the CMDO was obviously less of a council than a councillist organisation, thus functioning on the model of *soviet democracy*. As an improvised response to that precise moment the CMDO could neither present itself as a permanent councillist organisation, nor as such try to transform itself into an organisation of that kind. Nonetheless, an almost general agreement on the major situationist theses reinforced its cohesion.

Three committees had organised themselves within the general assembly to make its practical activity possible. The Printing Committee took charge of the writing and printing of CMDO publications, both using the machines to which it had access and in collaboration with certain printshops. The Liasson Committee, with ten cars at its disposal, took care of contacts with occupied factories and the delivery of material for distribution. The Requisitions Committee, which excelled during the most difficult period, made sure that paper, petrol, food, money and wine were never lacking. There was no permanent committee to ensure the rapid writing of the texts, whose content was determined by everyone, but on each occasion several members were designated, who then submitted the result to the assembly.

The CMDO itself occupied the buildings of the National Pedagogical Institute on the Rue d'Ulm, beginning on May 19th. At the end of May it moved to the basement of the building next door, a "School of Decorative Arts". The occupation of the Institute was of interest in that, while educators of all kinds were being denounced and ridiculed in their miserable profession, large groups of employees, workers and technicians seized the occasion to demand control of the workplace and valiantly supported the movement in all its forms of struggle (One placard advised: "Don't say 'Monsieur le Pedagogue', say 'Drop dead asshole!'"). Another reminded that "The educator himself must be educated".) Thus the Joint Committee of Occupation found itself in the hands of revolutionaries. An Enragé from Nanterre was put in charge of security. Nobody could stop congratulating himself on that choice, not even the pedagogues. Democratic order was disturbed by no-one, which made the greatest tolerance possible: one of the Stalinist personnel was even allowed to sell *L'Humanité* at the door. The red and black flags flew side by side on the front of the

building.

The CMDO published a certain number of texts. A Report on the Occupation of the Sorbonne on May 19th concluded: "The student struggle has now been superseded. Even more superseded are all the candidates for bureaucratic promotion who think it clever to feign a respect for the Stalinists at the very moment when the CGT and the so-called Communist Party are *trembling*. The outcome of the current crisis is in the hands of the workers themselves if they successfully realise in the occupation of their factories what the occupation of the university could only outline." On May 22nd the declaration For the Power of the Workers' Councils stated: "In ten days not only have hundreds of factories been spontaneously occupied by the workers and a spontaneous general strike totally disrupted the activity of the country but moreover several buildings belonging to the state have been occupied by *de facto* committees who are taking control. In such a situation, which in any case can't last, but which finds itself confronted with the choice of extending itself or disappearing, all the old ideas have been swept away and all radical hypotheses on the return of the revolutionary movement have been confirmed." This text spelt out three possibilities in order of decreasing probability: An agreement between the Government and the Communist Party "on the demobilisation of the workers in exchange for economic benefits"; the coming to power of the left "which will follow the same policy albeit from a weaker position"; and, finally, the workers speaking for themselves "by becoming conscious of demands which would express the radicalism of the forms of the struggle they have already put into practice". They showed how the prolonging of the current situation could contain such a perspective: "The need to reopen certain sectors of the economy *under workers' control* can lay the basis for this new power, which everything is pushing beyond the trades unions and existing parties. It will be necessary to put the railways and printing presses back into operation in the service of the working class struggle. It will be necessary for the new *de facto* authorities to requisition and distribute food."

On May 30th the Address to All Workers declared: "What we have done in France now haunts Europe. Soon it will threaten all the ruling classes of the world, from the bureaucrats of Moscow and Peking to the millionaires of Washington and Tokyo. *Just as we have made Paris dance*, the international proletariat will again take up arms against every capital city of every state, every citadel of every alienation. The occupation of factories and of the Government buildings throughout the entire country hasn't just stopped the economy, it has called the whole meaning of social life into question. Almost everybody wants to stop living this way. We are already a revolutionary movement. All we need is the widespread *consciousness of what we have already done*, and we will be the masters of this revolution... Those who turned down the ridiculous contract agreements offered them (agreements that overjoyed the trade union leaders) have still to discover that while they cannot 'receive' much more within the framework of the existing economy they can *take everything* if they transform the very bases of the economy on their own behalf. The bosses can hardly pay more - *but they could disappear*." The rest of the Address rejected the "bureaucratic-revolutionary patchwork" which attempted at Charléty to bring together all the small leftist groups, and refused the hand which the dissident Stalinist Andre Barjonet shamelessly extended to the Situationists. The Address showed that the power of the Workers' Councils was the only revolutionary solution, one that had already made its mark in the class struggles of this century. Later, intervening in the struggle at Flins, the CMDO issued on June 8th the tract It's Not Over which denounced the methods and aims of the unions in the affair: "The trades unions are ignorant of the class struggle; know only the laws of the market, and in their dealings claim to own the working class... The shameful manoeuvre to prevent reinforcements, from reaching the workers at Flins is only one more repugnant 'victory' for the unions in their struggle against the general strike... No unity with dividers."

The CMDO also published a certain number of posters, about 50 comic strips and several appropriate songs. Its major tracts had printings of between 150,000 and 200,000 copies. Naturally, trying to bring its practice and its theory into agreement, the CMDO contacted the workers of the occupied printshops, who gladly put back into operation the excellent machinery at their disposal (It is well known that the in-



dependent printers are less dominated by Stalinists than those of the press). The texts were also frequently reproduced in the provinces and abroad, immediately on arrival of the first copies (1). The CMDO itself took responsibility for their translation and first printing in English, German, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Arabic. The versions in Arabic and Spanish were first distributed among immigrant labourers. A falsified version of the Address was reprinted in Combat on June 3rd. The attacks against the Stalinists and the Situationist references had been deleted.

Quite successfully, the CMDO tried to establish and preserve links with factories, isolated workers, Action Committees and groups in the provinces. The link with Nantes was particularly well-assured. Beyond that the CMDO was present in all aspects of the struggle in Paris and the suburbs.

The Council for the Continuation of Occupations agreed to dissolve itself on June 15th. The ebbing of the Occupation Movement had led several of its members to raise the question of its dissolution a week earlier. That was delayed by the persistence of the struggles of the strikers, notably at Flins, who were refusing to accept defeat. The CMDO had never tried to get anything for itself, not even any recruitment which aimed at a permanent existence. Its participants did not separate their personal goals from the general goals of the movement. They were independent individuals who had come together for a struggle on a determined basis in a precise moment, and who once again became independent after the struggle had ended. Some of those among them, who recognised in the Situationist International the extension of their own activity, continued to work together in that organisation (2).

Other "Councillist" tendencies, in the sense that they were for the Councils without wanting to recognise their theory and their truth, appeared in the buildings of the Censier annex of the Faculte des Lettres, where they held, as the "Worker-Student Committee", a somewhat inactive discussion which could hardly progress towards a practical clarification. Groups like "Worker's Power" and the "Workers' Liasson and Action Group" made up of many individuals from various enterprises, made the mistake of accepting into their already confused and redundant debates all kinds of adversaries or saboteurs of their positions - Trotskyists and Maoists who paralysed the discussion, and who even publicly burned an anti-bureaucratic program drawn up by a committee assigned to the task. The councillors were able to intervene in some practical struggles, notably at the beginning of the general strike by sending members to help in a work stoppage or to reinforce picket lines. But their interventions often suffered from defects inherent in their very grouping: often several members from a single delegation offered fundamentally conflicting perspectives to the workers. The anti-trade union group "Workers' Information and Correspondence" (ICO) which was not councillorist and was not even sure of its being a group, nonetheless met in another room. Indifferent to the situation, they rehashed the usual rubbish in their bulletin and replayed their obstructionist psychodrama: was it necessary to stick to pure news, pasturised of any theoretical germ, or was the choice of news already inseparable from the hidden theoretical presuppositions? More generally, the defect of all these groups was to draw their proud experience from the past of working class defeats and never from the new conditions and new style of the struggle on which they maintained a principled ignorance. They repeated their usual *ideology* in the same boring tone that they had used during one or two decades of inactivity. They seemed to perceive nothing new in the Occupation Movement. They had already seen everything. They were blasé. Their knowing discouragement looked forward to nothing but the defeat so that they could draw its consequences as they had done so often in the past. The difference was that they had not had the chance of participating in the previous movements they had analysed, and this time they were living the moment which they *chose* to consider in advance from the angle of the historical spectacle, or even from that of an uninstrusive replay.

New councillorist tendencies did not appear in the crisis, aside from the CMDO, whereas the old ones were completely insignificant both in theory and in practice. The March 22nd Movement, of course, had some councillorist whims, as it had something of everything, but it never put them forward in its publications and its many inter-

views. Nonetheless, a growing audience for the call for Workers' Councils was manifest through the revolutionary crisis. That was one of the major effects, and remains one of its surest promises.

#### Footnotes

(1) Among the first reprints we can cite a Swedish pamphlet in the Libertad revolutionary series, a special issue of the clandestine Venezuelan publication, Proletario, and a pamphlet put out by the Japanese Zengakuren under the title LESSONS on the Defeat of the May Revolt in France.

(2) Certain outside elements were able to claim falsely to be from the CMDO in the same way that individuals, much more frequently, falsely claimed to be members of the SI out of sheer conceit or murkier motives. Two or three nostalgic former members of the CMDO naturally did not miss the chance to exploit their past in a miserably spectacular style. This was completely foreign to almost all the members, who contributed so many remarkable capacities without ever seeking to push themselves to the fore. The Council for the Continuation of Occupations will return one day, with its time, which will also return.



## 9 THE STATE REESTABLISHED

"Everyone must raise his head, assume his responsibilities and refuse intellectual terrorism... There is no reason for the State to turn over to just anybody its administrative and public institutions, nor for it to abandon its responsibilities and forget its duties."

Robert Poujade, Speech to the National Assembly,  
July 24th, 1968

The bourgeoisie had waited until May 30th to show openly its support for the State. With the speech of de Gaulle the entire ruling class took back the floor and massively affirmed its presence, after having prudently hibernated behind the protection of the CRS for several weeks. The demonstration at the Concorde and on the Champs Elysée was the sub-Versaillaise response to the parades of the CGT calling for a "popular government". Reactionary hysteria flowed freely, ranging from the fear of the "Reds" to revealing slogans such as "Cohn-Bendit to Dachau!" Old veterans, survivors of all the colonial wars, ministers, ex-commandos, shopkeepers, the kittens from the 16th Arrondissement and their sugar-daddies from the better parts of town, old hacks and all those whose interests and tastes lay in senility, came out together for the defence and praise of the Republic. The State thus recovered its base and the police their auxiliaries, in the UDR and the Civic Action Committees. As soon as de Gaulle decided to remain in power a violence without cant took over from the Stalinist repression, whose task it had been up to then to clog up the revolutionary breach, mainly in the factories. After 3 weeks of almost total absence, the State was able to relieve its hatchet-men in the Communist Party. It put as much effort into driving the workers out of the factories as the unions had put into keeping them locked up inside. De Gaulle had saved the Stalinists from the prospect of a "popular government" in which their overt role as the last enemies of the proletariat would have been so perilous. They would help him do the rest.

For both of them the question immediately became one of ending the strike and making way for the elections. The rejection of the Grenelle Agreement had taught the rulers to be wary of all negotiation at a national level. It was necessary to dismantle the strike in the same way that it had begun, sector by sector, factory by factory. The task was long and difficult. Everywhere the workers were openly hostile to the return to work. On June 5th a statement from the CGT headquarters announced that "Everywhere that essential demands have been met the interest of the workers is to come out en masse for a united resumption of work."

On the 6th June bank and insurance employees went back. The SNCF, a CGT bastion, also decided to go back. The trains, which had never been put at the disposal of the strikers, as the Belgian railway workers had done during the strike of 1961, were put back into operation for the State. The vote-falsifications for the resumption of work took place at the P&T and the RATP, where only a minority of union members were able to vote; CGT delegates brought about the resumption of work by announcing at each station that all the others had gone back. The employees at Nation, seeing through this gross manoeuvre, immediately stopped work but did not succeed in relaunching the movement.

The CRS intervened similarly to expel the striking technicians at France-Inter, and to replace them with army technicians. On June 6th they drove the workers out of the Renault factory at Flins. This was the first attempt, other than by ideology, to break the strike, which was still complete in metallurgy: the strike-breakers moved in, gun in hand. "The time for marches is over", wrote the Flins strikers in their call for the reoccupation of their factory, on June 6th. They realised at that moment just how destructive was the isolation they had put up with. Thousands of revolutionaries responded to their call, but only a few hundred were able to join them and fight at their sides. At the meeting organised by the unions at Elizabethville the workers forced the CGT delegate to allow Geismar, a member of

the March 22nd Movement to speak, not out of any feeling for his particular importance, but out of a simple concern for democracy.

The police attacked at 10 am. For 12 hours 2,000 workers and students fought it out with 4,000 police and CRS in the streets and fields of the neighbouring towns. They waited in vain for reinforcements from Paris. In fact the CGT had prevented the departure of the workers from Boulogne-Billancourt (1) and kept the trains at the Gare Sainte-Lazare from being put at the disposal of the thousands of demonstrators who had rushed there for the fight at Flins. The organisers of the demonstration, with Geismar and Sauvegeot in the lead, were just as brilliant. They ceded to the CGT and finished the work that it had begun by dissuading those who thought they were going to the aid of Flins from taking over a train, and calling on them to disperse after the first scuffles with the police. For all that, the miserable Geismar got no thanks for his efforts. This bore was still treated as a "specialist in provocation" in a particularly foul communication from the CGT, which did not hesitate to call the Flins revolutionaries "groups foreign to the working class", "paramilitary formations who have already made an appearance in similar operations in the Paris region" and who were "obviously acting in the interests of the worst enemies of the working class", for "it is hard to believe that the arrogance of the management in metallurgy, the support it is receiving from the Government, the police brutality against the workers and the attempts at provocation are not a concerted effort".

The unions were able to bring about the resumption of work almost everywhere; they had already been thrown some crumbs. Only the workers in metallurgy continued to hold out. After the setback at Flins the State was still going to take its chances at the Peugeot plant at Sochaux. On June 11th the CRS attacked the workers. The confrontation was quite violent and lasted several hours. For the first time in this extended crisis the forces of order fired into the crowd. Two workers were killed. The time had come when the authorities could act without provoking any reaction. The movement was already defeated and the political repression was beginning. Nonetheless, on June 12th one last night of rioting, in the wake of the death of a high school student at Flins, saw several innovations: the rapid multiplication of barricades and the systematic bombardment of the police with Molotov cocktails thrown from the roofs.

On the following day the State decreed the disbandment of the Maoist and Trotskyist organisations, along with the March 22nd Movement, using a law from the Popular Front period originally used against extreme right-wing paramilitary leagues (2). To the same extreme right, Gaullism was making real overtures under the table. This was the chance to recover the first May 13th - when the Fifth Republic was founded. The exiled leaders of the OAS returned to France. Salan left Tulle as the ultra leftists were beginning to populate the redoubt of Gravelle.

There was something rotten in the air after the tricolour flags had appeared on Concorde. Merchants, provocateurs, curates and patriots lifted their heads and returned to the streets in which they would not have dared to appear a few days before. Provocateurs in the pay of the police tried to whip up the Arabs and Jews in Belleville, and thereby provided an appropriate diversion while the mop-up operation in the factories and occupied buildings were being carried out. A campaign of calumny was stirred up around the Katangans at the Sorbonne. The pitiful leftists did not fail to be taken in by it.

After the failure of the experiment in direct democracy, the Sorbonne had seen the rise of several fiefdoms, as preposterous as they were bureaucratic. Those the press called the "Katangans", a group of ex-mercenaries, unemployed and déclassés, had quickly cut out for themselves a leadership role in a republic of corporals. The Sorbonne thus got the masters it deserved, but even though the Katangans had already played the game of authority, they did not deserve such miserable companions. Having come there to participate in the festival they found only the pedantic providers of boredom and impotence, the Kravetztes and Peninons. The students kicked out the Katangans in the ridiculous hope that they might get permission, by such a



low move, for lasting control of a disinfected Sorbonne for use as a "Summer University". One of the Katangans could rightly remark that "the students may be educated but they are not intelligent. We had come to help them out..." The retreat of the undesireables to the Odéon immediately provoked an intervention by the forces of order. The last occupants of the Sorbonne had only 48 hours to clean the walls and chase out the rats before the police arrived to let them know that the comedy was over once and for all. They left without the slightest resistance. After the defeat of the movement, only imbeciles could believe that the State would not take back the Sorbonne.

In order to ensure the success of the electoral campaign it was necessary to get rid of the last islands of resistance in metallurgy. The unions, and not capital, gave in on the agreements, which allowed L'Humanité to applaud the "victorious resumption of work" and the CGT to call upon the steelworkers to "prolong their success by the victory of the real union of the forces of the Left fighting around a common program in the coming elections." Renault, Rhodiaceta and Citroen went back on the 17th and 18th. The strike was over. The workers knew that they had won almost nothing. By prolonging the strike beyond May 30th, and by taking so long to end it, they had affirmed in their own way that they wanted something other than "economic benefits". What they had wanted was revolution. But they had been unable to say it, and had no time to make it.

After the defeat it was natural that the electoral competition of the different parties of order ended in the massive victory of the party in the best position to defend it.

The Gaullist victory was accompanied by the last mop-up operations for the return to normal. All occupied buildings were evacuated. It should be noted that the State waited until the first week of July to use the fundamental juridical argument that "the occupation of buildings designated for public service of any kind is illegal." For nearly two months it had been unable to use that argument against the Occupation Movement. (More or less fallacious pretexts were needed by the police to justify the recapture of the Odéon, the Sorbonne and the Ecole des Beaux Arts).

The acts of vandalism that had marked the beginning of the movement had reemerged all the more violently at its end, showing a refusal of defeat and a firm intention to continue the struggle. Thus, to cite only two exemplary acts, readers of Le Monde of July 6th were informed of "carpets destroyed with eggs, butter, talcum, detergent, black paint and oil; telephones ripped out and painted red, IBM machines destroyed with hammers, windows blackened with paint, medicines strewn about and daubed with paint, records blotted-out with spraycans, insulting and obscene slogans: this was the spectacle presented Wednesday morning by the medical offices, (including the secretary's office and that of the Social Service, baptised by the angry inscription 'Anti-Social Service') one of the most important sections of the Sainte-Anne Neuro-Psychiatric Hospital. A scene disturbingly similar to one in Nanterre, where the same means of devastation had been used and where slogans of the same style and spirit reappeared on all the walls... One wonders if there is not some relation between recent changes introduced in this field for strictly professional reasons and these acts of vandalism." In Combat on July 2nd: "Monsieur Jacquenod, headmaster of the experimental high school in Montgeron, writes - 'In the general interest it is my duty to inform you of the absolutely scandalous doings recently carried out in the Essonne region by the irresponsible Enragé commandos under the influence of a certain "Situationist International". Contrary to what the press has implied, these sad individuals have proved themselves more harmful than "colourful". The time for benevolence is past, and the shameful degradations of monuments to the dead, churches, monasteries and public buildings which have been carried out are quite simply intolerable. After getting themselves admitted to our building on false pretexts on the night of June 13-14, they went about sticking up some 300 posters, songs, tracts, comic strips and so on. But the real damage was caused by systematic paint scribbling on the walls of the high school and technical college. On June 21st, after the police had opened an enquiry, and out of sheer defiance, new degradations (posters, tracts, writings in ink) were committed in broad daylight inside the buildings.' Monsieur Jacquenod judges it

his duty to alert public opinion to these 'acts of vandalism, quite harmful to the peaceful climate we are gradually reestablishing'."

#### Footnotes

- (1) On the night of June 9 - 10 a delegation of workers from Flins came to ask for help in the occupied factories and at Boulogne-Billancourt. The students left, but at Billancourt the CGT pickets forbade the delegates access to the factory. The tight partitions which kept the workers in the factories also separated the workers of two factories in the same industry.
- (2) The pretext was badly framed, for these groups had never armed any militias. All revolutionaries will obviously show their solidarity against this sort of repression. Such measures by the police are, moreover, singularly unadapted to the character of autonomous non-hierarchical organisation which proved to be the most original aspect of the movement. Numerous commentaries on the disbandment tried to assimilate the Situationists to the March 22nd Movement. It was only in such circumstances, of course, that the SI did not publicly denounce such an assertion.



"The Situationist International has sown the wind. It will  
reap the whirlwind."

Internationale Situationniste, No. 8, January 1963

The Occupation Movement was immediately seen throughout the world as an historical event of tremendous importance, and as the beginning of a new, menacing era whose program proclaimed the speedy death of all existing governments. A renewal of internationalism and radicalisation of revolutionary tendencies was the response to the troubled stupor it created among the leaders and spokesmen of all ruling classes. The solidarity of the workers expressed itself in a number of ways - the longshoremen of Savone and Antwerp who refused to load goods going the France, the Belgian typesetters who prevented the stillborn referendum announced by de Gaulle on May 24th, by refusing to print the ballots.

Towards the middle of May the Radical Student Alliance in London sent an address to French workers and students, written in French: "We too have felt the blows of the police clubs and the effects of tear-gas; the betrayals of our so-called leaders are not unknown to us. The sum of these experiences has proved to us the necessity of joining in solidarity with the living struggles against oppressive structures in world society as well as in the universities... But you, comrades, have succeeded in pushing that struggle beyond a questioning of the class nature of the university to a struggle united with the workers which has as its goal the complete capitulation of capitalist society... Together with your comrades in the factories, in the ports and the offices, you have destroyed the myth of the stability of capitalist Europe, and consequently you have made both the regimes and the bourgeoisie tremble with fear. In the Stock Markets of Europe the capitalists are trembling, professors and aging gerontocrats are turning phrases to explain the action of the masses... Comrades, you have reanimated the traditions of 1871 and 1917, you have given international socialism a new force." The Co-ordinating Committee of the student strike at Columbia published a tract in New York at the beginning of June which declared: "For more than two weeks 12 million French workers and students have led a mass general strike against the same conditions which confront us in America... Despite the efforts of the trades union bureaucracies, including the 'Communist' leadership of the CGT, to moderate the movement and to arrive at a compromise with the employers and the Gaullist Government, the workers have voted to pursue the strike until their demands are satisfied... If we win in France it will give new life to the international movement which is already manifesting itself in Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan and even here in the United States. When we launch our own battles here we are helping to create the conditions for a victory in France and everywhere in the world. Their fight is our fight. The workers and students in France are looking to us in America for a response to their first giant step in the battle for a new society."

The barricades and Molotov cocktails of the Berkely students, the very same who had launched the agitation in the university four years earlier, responded at the end of June. In the middle of May a revolutionary organisation had been formed by the Austrian youth around the simple program of "doing the same as in France". At the end of the month occupations of university buildings had taken place in Germany, Stockholm, Brussels and at the Hornsey Art College in London. Barricades had gone up in Rome on May 31st. In June the students of Tokyo, always combative and resolved on turning the university district into a "Latin Quarter", occupied their faculties and defended them against the police. Not even Switzerland was spared: on June 29th and 30th, riots broke out in Zurich, where hundreds of demonstrators armed with stones and Molotov cocktails took the major police station by assault. "The violent demonstrations in Zurich," noted Le Monde on July 2nd, "provoked a certain stupor. Numerous Swiss, who believed their country to be immune from the movement of opposition breaking out in Europe were disturbed in their tranquility."

The struggle in the modern capitalist countries naturally awakened student agitation against the dictatorships and in 'underdeveloped' countries. At the end of May there were violent confrontations in Buenos Aires, Dakar, Madrid, and a student strike in Peru. In June the incidents were extended to Brazil and then to Uruguay where they culminated in a general strike, to Argentina, and to Turkey, where the universities of Istanbul and Ankara were occupied and closed till further notice, and finally to the Congo, where the high school students demanded the suppression of exams.

The most important of the immediate results of the French movement was the first tremor against the power of the bureaucratic classes of the East, when Yugoslav students occupied the University of Belgrade at the beginning of June. The students formed Action Committees, denounced the bureaucratic ownership of society, demanded *authentic self-management* in terms of freedom and the abolition of classes, and voted to rename the place "Karl Marx University". They addressed themselves to the workers: "We are outraged by the enormous social and economic differences in our society... We are for self-management but against the enrichment of the few at the expense of the working class." Their movement met with great approval among the workers. As at the Sorbonne, several workers also took the floor at the interminable meeting at the Philosophy faculty, where speakers endlessly took turns in the general enthusiasm. (Le Monde, June 7th). The regime saw itself stalked to death. The demagogical self-criticism and tearful concessions of Tito, who spoke of resigning if he could not meet the just demands that had been made, showed up the weakness and the panic of the Yugoslav bureaucracy. It knows perfectly well that the radical demands of the movement, whatever manoeuvres they left open for Tito himself, signalled nothing less than its own liquidation as a ruling class, and the proletarian revolution which is coming back to life, there as elsewhere. The concessions of the bureaucrats were accompanied in classical fashion with whatever dose of repression they could afford, and the usual calumnies which put forth the inverted reality of their ideology: the so-called Communist League thus denounced the "ultra-leftist radicals... eager to destroy both the democratic regime and self-management". Even Le Monde (June 12th) recognised that this was "the most important domestic alert that the regime had had since the war." Since then the uprising of the Mexican students has surpassed in scale all the other responses to the French Occupation Movement. Mexico is a country only half-emerged from Latin American underdevelopment.

France, too, remains in the volcanic chain of the new geography of revolution. Nothing has been settled there. The revolutionary eruption didn't come from an economic crisis, but, on the contrary, helped to create a crisis in the economy. What was attacked head-on in May was a *well-functioning capitalist economy*, but that economy, once shaken by the negative forces of its historical supersession, has to function *less well*: it thus becomes more unbearable, and reenforces its 'underside', the revolutionary movement which is transforming it. The student milieu has become a permanent stronghold of disorder in French life, and this time it is no longer the disorder of a *separated* youth. The big bureaucratic machines of working class integration paid a high price for their victory over the strike: many workers have understood. As for the small leftist groups, which were apparently reenforced (all the more so by their unnecessary disbandment by the police), they are virtually finished. The unobtrusive basket of crabs they constituted was strewn about in the limelight during the strike, but always in retreat.

The perspective of world revolution, when it reappeared in France, not only made up for the long delay of its fifty year absence, but displayed for this reason many *premature* aspects. Before the Occupation Movement crushed the State power confronting it, it accomplished what all the revolutionary movements (except that of 1905) had achieved only *afterwards*. The armed detachments at the disposal of the Government had not been defeated. And nevertheless the seizure of certain buildings and their notorious distribution among different subversive groups could not help but evoke some of the events of Barcelona in the Summer of 1936. The State was *ignored* for the first time in France; this was the first practical critique of Jacobinism, for so long the nightmare of French revolutionary movements, including the Commune. In other words, radically new elements were mixed with the sudden return of the



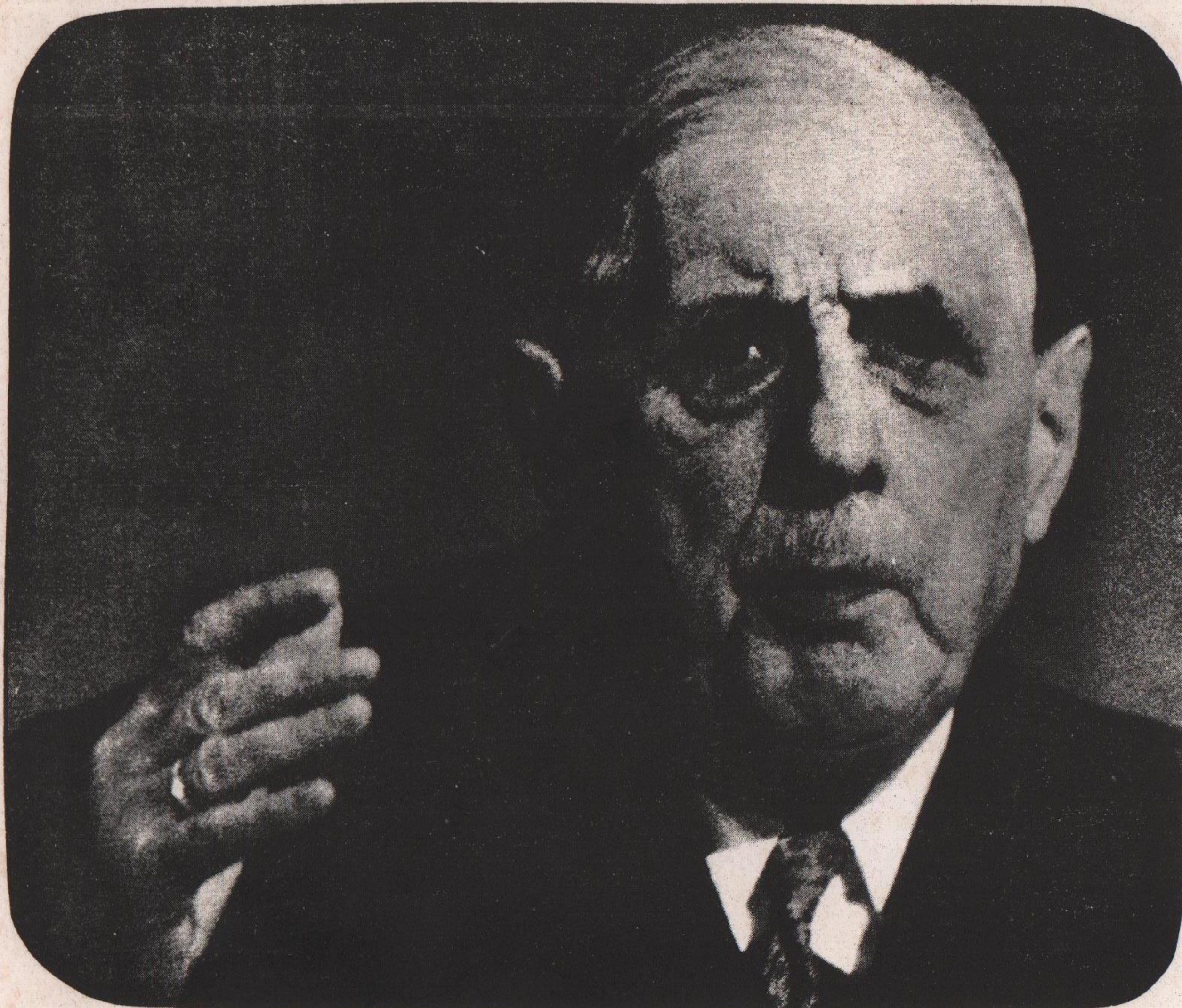
specific characteristics of French revolutions - the barricades in Paris awakening Europe. Just as it was *not enough* to simply ignore the State, there were certainly no sufficiently clear perspectives. Too few people had a coherent revolutionary theory, and its dissemination among the masses had to overcome extremely unfavourable conditions. Apart from the power of the existing order's spectacular media, there were the counter-revolutionary bureaucracies, which had at that time been unmasked by far too few. Thus no-one should be surprised by the many weaknesses of the movement, but rather be amazed at its strength.

Radical theory has been confirmed and tremendously strengthened. It should now make itself known everywhere for what it is, and break all new efforts by the hard-pressed recuperators. The carriers of radical theory had had no concessions to make. They must become even more demanding from the position of strength that history has given them. Nothing short of the international power of the Workers' Councils can satisfy them - they can recognise no revolutionary force other than the Councilist organisations which will be formed in every country. The objective conditions or revolution have become visible as soon as the revolution has begun, once again, to speak as an objective power. Now a fire has been lit which will never go out. The Occupation Movement has ended the sleep of all the masters of commodities, and never again will spectacular society sleep in peace.

#### Abbreviations and References

CAL	Comité d'Action Lycéenne : High School Action Committee
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail : second largest trades union in France
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail : The Communist Party trades union, the largest union in France
CMDO	Comité pour le Maintien des Occupations : see chapter 8
CNPF	Confédération Nationale du Patronat Français : National Federation of French Employers
CRS	Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité : national riot police
FER	Fédération des Etudiants Revolutionnaires : Trotskyists
ICO	Information et Correspondance Ouvrières : student-run bulletin of working class news
JCR	Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire : the major Trotskyist bureaucratic group of 'Young Communists'
NMPP	Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne : monopoly distributors of newspapers
OAS	Organisation de l'Armée Secrète : extreme right-wing paramilitary organisation for terror at the time of the Algerian War for independence
ORTF	Office de la Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française : Government controlled monopoly of radio and television
PCF	Parti Communiste Français : French Communist Party
PTT	Poste, Télégraphe et Télécommunications : national postal, telegraph and telephone system
RATP	Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens : Paris bus and underground rail system
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière : French 'Socialist' Party
SMIG	Salaire Minimum Intégrale Garantie : Minimum legal wage
SNCF	Société Nationale de Chemins de Fer Française : National Railway System
SNESup	Syndical National de l'Éducation Supérieure : National Union of Employees in Higher Education
UDR	Union pour la Défense de la République : both the Gaullist party since May (formerly UNR - Union pour la Nouvelle République) and groups of anti-red 'patriots' formed at de Gaulle's call on May 30th
UNEF	Union Nationale des Etudiants Français : National Students' Union
Fouchét Reform	: educational reform introduced by Minister Fouchét in 1966 for the 'modernisation' of French education. Followed in 1968 by the Faure Reform
Alain Geismar	: Maoist Secretary of the SNESup
Les Halles	: central warehouse district for food distribution in Paris, 'the belly of Paris', where has stood a massive hole in the ground since the urbanists demolished it in 1970
<u>L'Humanité</u>	: Communist Party daily paper
<u>Nouvel Observateur</u>	: modernist left-wing weekly paper
Jacques Sauvageot	: recuperator and bureaucratic boss of the UNEF
Georges Seguy	: Secretary-General of the CGT and major Stalinist
The Sorbonne	: the University of Paris





the enragés and the  
situationists in the  
occupation movement,  
France, May-June 1968  
by René Vienet

Tiger Papers Publications

ISBN 0 950 5967 0 3

"Apart from the twitching rock'n'  
rollers, who often resemble Chaplin  
in Modern Times, we are becoming a  
NATION OF SPECTATORS "" ""  
(Says Nina Epton, 1960, "Love and The English")

BUT

In 1968 a lot of the French stopped  
watching and joined in a sort of a  
NATIONAL ANTI-INDUSTRIAL FESTIVAL. This  
book is written by someone from an  
important centre in the occupation  
movement — the place where situ-  
ationist theory met its willing agents,  
the enraged students, who, through  
street protest and occupations, shook  
the economy and the state to their  
very foundations.