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MAY '68

THE ANTICIPATED REVOLUTION

May 1968 is already engraved in history. We will not, however, make it into an engraving. At the time these lines are being written, the crisis unleashed two months ago by a few *enragés* from Nanterre [University] is shaking French society from its roots to the summits of power. The meticulously refined mechanism of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions has become clogged. In order to maintain his power, the Head of State is forced to call upon his supporters to set up private groups. On all sides, from the bewildered brains of our brilliant leaders spout forth nothing but the emptiness that has always been within them. Millions of people

Written between May 20 and 25, 1968, the first part of this text (the untitled introduction, "Need for an Organized Revolutionary Movement," and "Proposals for the Immediate Constitution of a Revolutionary Movement") was roneotyped and distributed by former comrades of S. ou B. at the end of May. The entire text was published, along with texts by Edgar Morin and Claude Lefort, in *Mai 1968: La Brèche* (Paris: Fayard; printer's completion date marked as June 21, 1968). "La Révolution anticipée" was reprinted in *SF*, pp. 165–221. [T/E: A liberal translation of small parts of "La Révolution anticipée" appeared in "France, 1968," the concluding chapter of *Paris: May 1968*, written in large part, but not signed by, Maurice Brinton (London: Solidarity, June 1968; 2nd ed., London: Dark Star Press and Rebel Press, 1986). *La Brèche* was subsequently republished in 1988 by Editions Complexe with *Vingt Ans Après*, a series of retrospective articles by Morin ("Mais" [1978] and "Mai 68: complexité et ambiguïté" [1986]) and Lefort ("Relecture" [1988]), as well as Castoriadis's 1986 article, "Les Mouvements des années soixante," which also appeared in translation as "The Movements of the Sixties," *Thesis Eleven*, 18/19 (1987), pp. 20–31. In preparing the present English-language version of Castoriadis's essay from *La Brèche*, I have used the late Basil Druiitt's unpublished translation, which was made available by Solidarity's Maurice Brinton. The typescript copy includes handwritten corrections by the author. For its publication in the present edition, substantial alterations have been made in this unfinished translation. Let me also note that, in response to a question I posed, Castoriadis informs me that, in translation, this text could just as well bear the title "The Revolution Anticipated" as its present title, "The Anticipated Revolution."]

struggle, thereby making it clear that the problem of how society is to be organized has been posed. Perhaps they will also see that they alone can resolve it. History, and people themselves, are engaged in a process of creation, and the meaning of what is happening remains wide open. It is not our intention to try to rigidify this process, or to speak about a present, more alive than ever, as though it were a dead past. To transform things, however, we have to understand them; to advance we have to orient ourselves.

The signification of the events of the last four weeks surpasses, in depth and in its certain repercussions, that of all previous struggles in France or elsewhere—not only because of those nine million workers on strike for twenty days, but above all because of what is qualitatively new in the content of the movement. In past revolutions—the Paris Commune, 1917, Catalonia 1936, Budapest 1956—one can find antecedents and seeds. For the first time in a modern bureaucratic-capitalist society, however, no longer is there just the radical demand, now there is the most radical revolutionary *affirmation* ablaze before everyone's eyes and spreading throughout the world. We must calmly let the following idea start to sink in: whatever the outcome, May '68 has opened a new period of universal history.

No longer in theory but in the acts themselves, not for a few days but for several weeks, not among the initiated few but among hundreds of thousands of people, ideas that bear fruit, acts that serve to organize, and the exemplary forms of modern revolution have gained popular currency and become a reality. This is happening in the most modern sectors of society, but the same process is also taking place where these ideas, acts, and forms might have appeared quite reckless and most difficult to achieve.

In a few days the revolutionary student movement has spread throughout the country. It has challenged the hierarchy and is beginning to pull it down where it seemed unassailable: in the field of knowledge and education. It has called for, and is beginning to bring about, the autonomous and democratic self-management of collectivities. It is challenging and considerably loosening the monopoly over information held by various centers of power. It is putting into question not the details but the very foundations and the substance of contemporary "civilization": consumer society, the partitioning of manual workers from intellectuals, the sacrosanct character of the University and of other holy places of bureaucratic-capitalist culture.

These are the necessary presuppositions for a revolutionary reconstruction of society. These are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a radical break with the bureaucratic-capitalist world. In contact with these touchstones, the revolutionary or reactionary nature of individuals, groups, and currents of opinion is continuously being revealed.

Just as much as in its aims, the revolutionary nature of the present movement is apparent in its modes of action, in its mode of being, and in their indissoluble unity.

From one day to the next, the immense creative potential of society, which bureaucratic capitalism had bound and gagged, explodes forth. The most audacious and the most realistic ideas (these are the same thing) are advanced, discussed, and applied. Language, which had been flattened and emptied by decades of dull dron-

ings emanating from the spheres of bureaucracy, advertising, and culture, shines forth fresh and resplendent. People reappropriate it in its fullness. Brilliant, effective, poetic slogans flash forth from the anonymous crowd. The educators are rapidly becoming educated; university professors and high-school teachers have not recovered from the surprise of realizing the intelligence of their pupils and the absurdity and uselessness of what they have been teaching them.

In a few days, twenty-year-old youths are gaining an understanding and a political wisdom that sincere revolutionaries have not yet achieved after thirty years as militant activists. In the March 22nd Movement,¹ in the UNEF,² and in SNE Sup,³ leaders have appeared whose farsightedness and effectiveness yields nothing when compared to leaders of former times, and who, above all, are instaurating a new relationship with the masses. Renouncing neither their personalities nor their responsibilities, they are not "brilliant bosses," but rather the expression of the collectivity, and its leaven.

Sharing a trait characteristic of all revolutions, the movement is self-developing and self-fertilizing during its ascendent phase (May 3 to 24). It triggers the workers' strike walkouts. It transforms both the social relation of forces and the populace's image of institutions and personages. With a profound sense of tactics it obliges the State to reveal, step by step, its repressive, police-state nature. More than that, it renders visible an immense established disorder within the established order. It shows that the true substance of bureaucratic-capitalistic organization is total anarchy. It forces top university administrators and government ministers to reveal to everyone their incoherence, their incompetency, their professional imbecility. It pulls the mask from the "the only people competent to govern" by showing them to be the greatest incompetents of all.

On every institutional level—governmental, parliamentary, administrative, that of political parties—the movement reveals the prevailing emptiness. With bare hands the students are forcing the powers that be to display, behind their solemnities, their high-mindedness, their bluster, the *fear* that possesses them, a fear that has and can only have recourse to the truncheon and to the tear-gas grenade. At the same time, the movement impels the bureaucratic "working-class" leadership groups to reveal themselves as the ultimate guarantors of the established order, full partners in its incoherence and its anarchy. The movement has cut deep into the flesh of the French managerial strata, and the wound will not heal so soon.

The present movement is profoundly modern because it dissolves away the mystifying notion of a well-organized, well-oiled, good society, where only a few marginal problems remain and where radical conflict no longer exists. This violent upheaval took place not in the Congo, or in China, or in Greece, but in a country where contemporary bureaucratic capitalism is flourishing and well established, where highly educated administrators have been administering everything and very intelligent planners have foreseen everything. It is also modern, however, because it enables us to throw overboard a mass of ideological dross weighing down upon revolutionary activity. It was provoked not by the hunger to which capitalism supposedly condemns people or by some economic crisis that might somehow have influenced events. It had nothing to do with "underconsumption," or with "overproduction," or with the "falling rate of profit." Nor is it centered on economic demands; on the

contrary, it is only by going beyond the economic demands in which student syndicalism had become enmeshed for so long (with the blessing of “left-wing” parties) that it became itself. And inversely, it is in bottling up the movement of wage earners in strictly economic demands that the trade-union bureaucracies have tried and are trying to minimize the break of this fractured regime.

The present movement shows that the fundamental contradiction of bureaucratic-capitalist society is not the “anarchy of the market” or the antinomy between “the development of the forces of production and forms of property ownership” or between “collective production and private appropriation.” The central conflict around which all the others are arrayed is shown to be that between directors and executants. The insurmountable contradiction that structures [*organise*] the tear running through this society manifests itself in bureaucratic capitalism’s need to exclude people from the management of their own affairs, *and* in its inability to succeed in doing so (if it were to succeed, it would immediately collapse due to its very success). Its human and political expression is to be found in the bureaucrats’ project of transforming people into objects (whether by violence, mystification, manipulation, teaching methods, or economic “carrots”) and in people’s refusal to let this happen.

One can clearly see in the present movement what all revolutions have shown—but that must be learned anew. There is no “glowing” revolutionary perspective, no “gradual growth of contradictions,” and no “progressive accumulation of a mass revolutionary consciousness.” There is the insurmountable contradiction and conflict of which we have just spoken, and there is the fact that society is periodically forced to produce those unavoidable “accidents” that obstruct it from functioning and that touch off peoples’ struggles against the way it is organized.

The functioning of bureaucratic capitalism creates the *conditions* for an awakening of consciousness, conditions that are materially embodied in the very structure of alienating and oppressive society. When people are led to struggle, it is this social structure that they have to put into question, especially since bureaucratic anarcho-despotism constantly raises the question of how society is to be organized as an explicit problem in everyone’s eyes.

Of course, the movement presents us with a characteristic antinomy: profoundly modern in its aims and in the strata animating it, it discovers its flammable materials in a sector of French capitalism that has remained antiquated, in a university whose structure has not changed for centuries. These structures, as such, are not typical. On the contrary. Anglo-Saxon universities have been “modernized,” and this certainly has not immunized them against the outbreak of the same sort of conflicts. We have seen this in the events at Berkeley in the United States or at the LSE [London School of Economics] in London. What is typical is precisely the congenital and recurrent incapacity of bureaucratic-capitalist society to “modernize” itself without a profound crisis—as the problem of the French peasantry, the question of blacks in the United States, and even the issue of underdevelopment on a world scale all show on different levels. Through each of these crises is posed the question of the entire organization of society.

Finally, it is fundamental that the active core of the movement should have been the young—student youth in particular, but that of other social categories too.

Everyone knows it, and tears come even to the government's eyes when mentioning it. No existing institutions or organizations, however, be they Left or Right, can co-opt the meaning of this fact. Young people do not want to take their elders' place in an already-agreed-upon system. Youth vomits up this system, the future it proposes, and all its variants—even those that are “left-wing.” Youth is not caught in a generational conflict, but in a social conflict of which it is one of the poles because of its refusal and rejection of the whole set of frameworks and values of the established disorder. We shall return to this point in the second part of our text.

All this—and probably many more things we do not have the time to say right now and even are incapable of seeing—will take months and years to elaborate and deepen in order to bring to light for everyone its meaning. For the moment, however, the urgency lies elsewhere.

Need for an Organized Revolutionary Movement

From the moment that the student movement led to a near-total general strike—nay, from the moment the majority of workers rejected the incredible swindle of the Grenelle Accords⁴—the crisis became objectively a total crisis of the regime and of society. At the same time, however, beyond the bottlenecks of institutional life and the emptiness of the political “leadership” groups, *the absolute political void* existing in the country became apparent.

We shall return to the analysis of this crisis and to the possible prospects it opens up. But here and now one thing is certain. The revolution must acquire a face. The revolution must make its voice heard. To aid in this endeavor a revolutionary movement of a new type is indispensable, and *now* possible. We say this independently of all “predictions”; whatever the outcome of events, the meaning and the necessity for such a movement are certain.

One can look back on the recent weeks and say that everything would have come off differently if there had existed a sufficiently powerful revolutionary movement capable, day after day, of foiling the bureaucracy's maneuvers, of exposing the duplicity of the “leadership” of the Left, of indicating to the workers the deep-seated meaning of the student struggles, of spreading the idea of forming autonomous strike committees first of all, then workers' councils, and finally of having these workers' councils start up production again. True, an enormous number of things on all levels should have been done and have not been done because such a movement did not exist. True, as the experience of the outbreak of the student struggles has demonstrated once again, such a movement could have played a capital role as catalyst, as enzyme, as lock-breaker. It could have done so without becoming, for all that, the bureaucratic “management” of the masses, remaining instead the instrument of their struggle and being, provisionally, their most lucid fraction. Such hindsight and such regrets, however, are futile. Not only is the physical nonexistence of such a movement not due to chance: had it existed, had it been formed in the foregoing period, it certainly would not have been the movement we are talking about. One can take the “best” of all the extant tiny groups, multiply its membership a thousandfold, and still have nothing capable of rising to the exigencies and the spirit of the present situation. This has been seen in the events: the existing extreme-left

groups did not know what to do, other than to replay interminably exactly the same prerecorded message, their substitute for any real guts. For the same reason, it would be pointless to try to repaste all these groups together. Whatever might have been their merits—for different reasons and to different degrees—as the conservators of the ashes of the revolution, which have been cold for decades, they have once again, in the test of events, shown themselves incapable of breaking out of their ideological and practical routine, unsuited as they are to learn as well as to forget anything.

The urgent task of the hour is the constitution of a new revolutionary movement out of these recent struggles, based upon their total experience. The formation of such a movement can only be accomplished through the regrouping of young students, workers, and others who have united in these struggles, on ideological and organizational bases that they themselves will have to define.

Revolutionary students have a primary responsibility in this effort to constitute a new revolutionary movement. The problems raised by the student movement, and the responses it has given, go far beyond the confines of the universities. They have a signification for the whole of society, and because of this, the revolutionary students must now assume their universal responsibilities.

If this is not done, it would mean the isolation and ultimate defeat of the student movement. It would mean the triumph of the line common to [Prime Minister Georges] Pompidou and [Communist trade-union leader Georges] Séguy:⁵ that each person should stay in his place, that students should busy themselves with their own business and workers with theirs, thus leaving the government and political “leadership” groups free to take care of the business of society.

The movement of revolutionary students, however, cannot play a general role while remaining merely student oriented. This would amount to trying to act on other social sectors from the “outside,” an attitude both false and sterile. The student movement has already acted “from the outside” on other social strata of the population by providing them with an example, by teaching them once more the meaning of struggle, by prompting a general strike. Under other forms, it can and should continue to play this role. If it remains, however, simply a student movement, it will not be able to give society what above all is missing at the present hour: a full and coherent voice that would burst apart the void of political blather today. It should neither transpose nor introduce from the outside what has made it so effective and fruitful on its own terrain: objectives that correspond to the deep-seated aims of those directly involved, action that springs from an organic collectivity.

The fact that the Nanterre movement has spilled over into the educational sphere as a whole has already required a change of terrain on which the struggle takes place, along with a transformation of the forms, objectives, and organizational structures of this struggle. The transition from the movement addressing student concerns to a movement dealing with overall issues will require a transformation qualitatively much greater, and much more difficult.

This difficulty—indicated by a thousand signs since May 13—pertains to a large number of organically linked factors.

The student movement has known success, it has become a reality and experienced joy on a terrain that is naturally its own: the universities and the surround-

ing areas. To say that it must pass to the level of true politics and face society in its entirety is apparently to take this ground out from under its feet, without offering it another comparable one right away.

It has tested its effectiveness. It has shown an admirable tactical sense, using methods of action that cannot at present be transposed, as such, onto the scale of society as a whole.

It has short-circuited the most difficult organizational problems because it acted in professionally and locally concentrated and unified collectivities. And now it is obliged to confront the heterogeneity and diversity of the society and the nation.

It is understandable that under these conditions many student revolutionaries refuse what seems to them the pure and simple abandonment of what, until now, has proved to be the only fertile ground.

It is for this reason that it has continually manifested tendencies toward a "flight in advance"—which in fact is only "flight sideways" and runs the risk of becoming a "flight backward." These tendencies arise from a false image of the situation. The explosive potentialities that a month ago existed in the student mass do not yet exist among the ranks of wage and salary earners. Seeking to perpetuate artificially the conditions of mid-May can only lead to completely unrealistic collective phantasms and spasmodic "double or nothing" wagers, which, far from serving as examples, will not teach anyone anything.

These difficulties, however, are connected to other, much more profound ones, because they refer us back to the decisive problems, to the ultimate question marks of revolutionary activity and of the revolution itself. By expressing these in their behavior, the revolutionary students give proof of a maturity that must be given the treatment it deserves: by speaking of it without reserve or circumspection.

The revolutionary students feel an antinomy between action and reflection: between spontaneity and organization, between truth of act and coherence of speech, between imagination and project. Their perception of this antinomy is what consciously or unconsciously lies behind their hesitations.

This perception is nourished by all previous experience. As others have seen happen over decades, they have seen reflection turn to sterile and sterilizing dogma in a few months or weeks; they have seen organization become bureaucracy and lifeless routine, speech transformed into the grinding out of mystified and mystifying words, projects degenerating into rigid and stereotyped programs. They have broken out of these yokes through their acts, their audacity, their refusal of theses and platforms, their spontaneous collectivization.

However, one cannot remain there. To accept this antinomy as valid, final, and insurmountable is to accept the very essence of bureaucratic-capitalist ideology. It is to accept the existing philosophy and reality. It is to reject a real attempt at transforming the world. It is to integrate the revolution into the established historical order. If the revolution is *only* an explosion lasting a few days or weeks, the established order (whether it knows it or not, whether it wants it or not) can quite easily accommodate itself to such an outbreak. Moreover, contrary to what it believes, the established order has a deep-seated need for these explosions. Historically, it is revolution that permits the world of reaction to survive as it transforms and adapts itself—and today we risk experiencing a fresh demonstration of this truth. These explosions

shatter the imaginary or unreal setting in which alienated society, by its very nature, tends to enclose itself—and they oblige alienated society to seek out new forms of oppression better adapted to today's conditions, even if it finds them through the elimination of yesterday's oppressors.

That society can revolt, live days and weeks of lucid intoxication and intense creation, has always been known. Old Michelet, writing about the French Revolution, said, "That day everything was possible . . . , the future was present. . . . [T]ime was no more, a glimmer of eternity." If, however, it is only a glimmer, the bureaucrats, with their dull lanterns, will immediately reappear as the only source of light. That society or one of its sections would be capable of rending momentarily the veils enveloping it and of leaping beyond its shadow, that is not the question. This is only the *posing* of the question; it is *for that* that the problem is *posed*. It is not a matter of living one night of love. It is a matter of living a whole life of love. If today we find ourselves faced with [Communist party General Secretary] Waldeck-Rochet⁶ and Séguy, it is not because the Russian workers were unable to overthrow the Ancien Régime. It is, on the contrary, because they were capable of it—and because they were not able to instaurate, to institute their own power.

To leave oneself locked in this dilemma—between the moment of creative explosion, on the one hand, and the duration of time, which can only mean alienation, on the other—is to remain prisoner of the established order. Accepting the grounds on which this dilemma can be posed amounts to accepting the ultimate presuppositions of the ideology that has been dominant for millennia. It is to be the Saint Theresa of the Revolution, ready to pay for rare instants of grace with years of barrenness.

To accept that action excludes reflection is implicitly to admit that all reflection lacks a true object. As man cannot do without reflection, the field of reflection is given over to the makers of mystifications and to the ideologues of reaction.

To accept that spontaneity and organization are mutually exclusive is to give over the field of organization—without which no society can survive for a single day—to the bureaucrats.

To accept that reason and imagination are mutually exclusive is to have understood nothing about either one. When imagination surpasses dreams and delirium, and achieves lasting results, it is because it is constituting new universal forms. When rationality is creative reason, and not empty repetition, it is because it is nourished by imaginary sources for which no "scientific" pseudorationality can account.

Just as permanent "seriousness" is the height of the grotesque, so permanent feast is endless sadness. To accept the seriousness/festiveness antinomy as absolute is to accept the leisure civilization of our time. One breaks life into two portions, a "serious" part delivered over to organizers and a "free" part delivered over to salesmen of pleasure and entertainment [*spectacle*],—which may even include, at the limit, revolutionary "happenings."

If the socialist revolution has any meaning at all, it is certainly not to replace the bourgeoisie by "working-class" bureaucrats. Yet this is where it would surely end up if it refused to face up to these questions.

If the socialist revolution is to advance, it will not be by "making a synthesis"

of these antinomies, or by “overcoming” them. It will be by destroying the very ground from which they inevitably arise.

Will human society be able to effect this passage, not a passage toward a world without problems, but toward a world that will have left behind *these particular* problems? We do not know—and under this form the question has no interest today. The only thing that makes any sense is action in this direction—whether one thinks, as we do, that this passage is possible, or whether one thinks, as others might, that this action alone introduces into history the minimum of movement and truth it can tolerate. Beyond that, one is only a consumer or a “desperado.” In a consumer society, however, “desperados” are soon transformed into consumer objects.

From early on, many revolutionary students have been worried by the danger that the movement will be “coopted” [récupération] by the old forces. However, the danger of cooptation of an explosion that remains simply an explosion is just as great, if not greater.

Someone who is afraid of cooptation has already been coopted. His attitude has been coopted—since it has been blocked up. The deepest reaches of his mind have been coopted, for there he seeks guarantees against being coopted, and thus he has already been caught in the trap of reactionary ideology: the search for an anticooptation talisman or fetishistic magic charm. There is *no* guarantee against cooptation; in a sense, everything can be coopted, and everything is one day or another. Pompidou quotes Apollinaire, Waldeck-Rochet calls himself a communist, there is a mausoleum for Lenin, people get rich selling Freud, May Day is a legal holiday. We should also point out, however, that the coopters coopt only corpses. For us, inasmuch as we are alive, Apollinaire’s voice still speaks to us anew; ever and again the lines of the *Communist Manifesto* vibrate, giving us a glimpse into the chasm of history; ever and again the phrase [of Lenin] “Take back what has been taken from you” resounds in our ears; ever and again the [Freudian statement] “Where Id was, Ego shall become” reminds us of its unsurpassable exigency; ever and again the blood of the Chicago workers clouds and clears our vision. Everything can be coopted—save one thing: our own reflective, critical, autonomous activity.

To fight cooptation is to extend this activity beyond the here and now; it is to give it a form that will convey its content for all time and make it utterly impossible to coopt—that is, capable of being conquered again and again, in its ever-new truth, by living beings.

One does not avoid cooptation by refusing to define oneself. One does not avoid the arbitrary, but hastens toward it, by refusing to organize collectively. When someone in a gathering of two hundred people proposes a leaflet with dozens of slogans such as the suppression of chattel property and the nationalization of the family (or the other way around—it did not matter in the context) and is told in the end to print the leaflet in the name of the March 22nd Action Committee, is this the negation of bureaucracy or is it the arbitrary power of one person’s (momentary) incoherence imposed upon a collectivity that will bear the consequences thereof?

(For those who prefer philosophical language: certainly, the movement must maintain and enlarge its openness as far as possible. Openness, however, is not and can never be absolute openness. Absolute openness is nothingness—that is to say, it is immediately absolute closure. Openness is that which constantly displaces and

transforms its own terms and even its own field, but can exist only if, at each instant, it leans on a provisional organization of the field. A question mark standing alone signifies nothing, not even a question. To signify a question it has to be preceded by a sentence, and it has to posit that certain of its terms possess a meaning that, for the moment, is not in question. An interrogative statement puts in question certain significations while affirming others—only to come back to these later on.)

The revolutionary students have had the experience of the traditional groupuscules, which are, at bottom, prisoners of the most deep-seated practical and ideological structures of bureaucratic capitalism; rigid, predetermined programs fixed once and for all; repetitious speeches no matter what is really going on; organizational forms copied from the social relations extant in established society. These groups reproduce within themselves the division between directors [*dirigeants*] and executives, the scission between those who “know” and those who “do not know,” the separation between a scholastic pseudotheory and life. This is the division, the scission they wish to establish in relation to the working class, of which they all aspire to become the “leaders” [*dirigeants*].

One does not exit from this universe, however, but on the contrary encloses oneself within it when one thinks it suffices simply to take the contrary of each of these terms, the negation of each of them, in order to find the truth. One cannot overcome bureaucratic organization by refusing all organization, nor the sterile rigidity of platforms and programs by refusing all definition of objectives and means, nor the sclerosis of dead dogmas by condemning true theoretical reflection.

True, this way out is difficult, the path very narrow. The specificity of a crisis as deep as the one through which France is passing at this moment is that everyone walks on a razor’s edge, revolutionaries most of all. For the government, for the bosses, for the bureaucratic managers, what is at stake are their positions, their money, and, if things get out of hand, their heads—that is to say, practically nothing. For us, the danger is greatest, for what is at stake is our very being as revolutionaries. What we risk now is much more than our skin; it is the deepest meaning [*signification*] of what we are fighting for and of what we are, which depends on the possibility of our making something other than a momentary explosion out of what has happened, of our constituting it without taking away its life, of our giving it a face that can move about and look at what is going on; in short, it depends on the possibility of our destroying the dilemmas and antinomies already described, and the ground from which they arise.

Recent experience already shows us the way.

Should a revolutionary minority “intervene” or not? By what means, and up to what point? If, first, a few *enragés* from Nanterre, and then the March 22nd Movement, and finally a good number of revolutionary students had not “intervened,” it is obvious nothing of what has happened would have taken place, as it is obvious that these interventions would not have had an effect if a large portion of the student body had not been virtually ready to act. In intervening, a minority that assumes its responsibilities acts with the most extreme audacity but also senses up to what point the mass is willing and able to go; it thus becomes a catalyzing agent and a source of revelation that leaves behind it the dilemma about voluntarism versus spontaneity.

Similarly: Are the demands put forward concerning the universities “minimum” or “maximum,” “reformist” or “revolutionary”? In a sense, they may seem “revolutionary” according to the terms of traditional language, since they could not be achieved without an overthrow of the social system (you cannot build “socialism in one university”). In other people’s eyes, they appear “reformist” precisely because they seem to concern the university alone, and because one can easily conceive their being realized in a watered-down, coopted form, the better to keep present-day society functioning (which leads some people to denounce them or to lack interest in them). In this case, however, it is this very distinction that is false. The positive and underlying meaning of these demands lies elsewhere: being partially applicable within the framework of the existing system of rule, they make it possible to put the system constantly into question. Applying them will immediately raise new problems: their application will daily present to the horrified eyes of a hierarchical society the scandal of undergraduates discussing together with eminent scientists the content and the methods of education; it will help to mold people whose conception of the social world, of authority relations, of the management of collective activities will, if only in part, have been transformed.

The problems raised by the question of how to constitute a revolutionary movement must be tackled in the spirit that emerges from these examples.

Proposals for the Immediate Constitution of a Revolutionary Movement

The movement cannot exist unless it defines itself. And it cannot continue unless it refuses to let itself become solidified into a definition given once and for all.

Obviously, the movement must define itself and develop its own structure. If, as one ought to think, it is called upon to expand and to develop, its ideas, its forms of action, and its organizational structures will undergo a constant transformation. This transformation will take place as a function of its experience and of its work, as well as of the contributions of those who will come to join the movement. It is not a matter of setting in stone, once and for all, its “program,” its “statutes,” and its “roster of activities,” but of *commencing* what should remain a permanent effort at self-definition and self-organization.

Principles

The movement should be inspired by the following ideas, which are valid for the socialist reconstruction of society, as well as for the movement’s own internal functioning and for the conduct of its activities.

Under the conditions of the modern world, the suppression of the ruling and exploiting classes requires not only the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, but also the elimination of the division between directors and executants as distinct social strata. Consequently, the movement combats this division wherever it is to be found, and does not accept it within its own ranks. For the same reason, it fights hierarchy in all its forms.

What is to replace the social division between directors and executants and the

bureaucratic hierarchy in which it is embodied is self-management [*autogestion*], namely, the autonomous and democratic management of various activities by the collective action of those who carry them out. Self-management requires the actual exercise of power by collective bodies of those directly concerned in their own area, that is, the widest possible direct democracy; the election and permanent revocability of each delegate with any particular responsibility; the coordination of activities by committees of delegates also elected and liable to recall at any time.

The actual exercise of self-management implies and requires the permanent circulation of information and ideas. It also requires the elimination of partitions between social categories. It is, lastly, impossible without the plurality and diversity of opinions and tendencies.

Organizational Structures

The organizational structures of the movement stem directly from these principles:

constitution of grass-roots groups of a size that allows both an effective division of tasks and fruitful political discussion;

coordination of the general activities of the grass-roots groups through coordinating committees made up of elected and revocable delegates;

coordination of activities dealing with specific tasks through corresponding commissions, also made up of elected and revocable delegates;

technical executive commissions under the political control of the coordinating committees;

deliberative general assemblies bringing together all the grass-roots groups, as frequently as conditions permit it.

Internal functioning

Two ideas essential from the outset:

The task of the general organs (coordinating committees, specialized commissions) above all should be to collect information and recirculate it within the movement; that of the grass-roots groups above all should be to make the decisions. It is of the essence to invert the usual bureaucratic-capitalist schema (where information can travel only upward and decisions can come only downward).

A permanent task of the movement will be to organize and facilitate the active participation of all in the elaboration of its policies and its ideas and in the making of decisions in full knowledge of the relevant facts. If this is not done, a division between "politicos" and "executants" will rapidly reappear. To fight against this division is not a matter of initiating a "political literacy" campaign on the bourgeois model, as is usually done in the traditional organizations, but rather of aiding militants to reflect critically, starting from their own experience, using methods of active political self-education.

Forms of Action

These can only be defined as events occur, and on actual terrains. The general direction in which they should tend, however, should be to aid laboring people to struggle for the above-mentioned objectives and to organize along analogous lines.

Nonetheless, a certain number of *immediate tasks* should be defined and carried out at once. They are, in logical and temporal order:

1. *To organize* along these lines, or at least along lines that allow the movement to decide collectively on its organization and its orientation.
2. To produce *a journal* as rapidly as possible. A journal is not only immensely important from the informational, propagandistic, and agitational points of view; its importance also lies above all in the following:

The journal can and should be a *collective* means of *organizing* people. At the present stage, it is the only way to answer the demand of those comrades in various places and circles who would like to organize with the movement. Simply by reproducing the movement's guiding principles and organizing principles and by describing its activities, the journal will make it possible for people to respond to the question What is to be done? as they organize themselves and make contact with the movement, without the movement needing to "organize them," a task that would be both difficult and questionable.

The journal can be an essential tool for overcoming the possible division *within* the movement between "politicos" and "ordinary militants," as well as *between* the movement itself and the outside world. This can be done while remaining open to all by (a) organizing the active participation of grass-roots groups in the preparation of the paper (the grass-roots groups each being responsible for a definite column or section of the paper); (b) making its columns widely available to its readership, encouraging their participation (not only through the publication of contributions and letters, but through the systematic organization of recorded interviews, etc.).

3. To explain everywhere and by all available means (meetings, journal, leaflets, and later pamphlets, etc.) the profound and universal meaning of the students' action and of its objectives:

The signification of the demand for *collective management*; of the struggle *against the division between directors and executants and against hierarchy*; of the explosion of *creative activity* among the young; of their *self-organization*. All the themes of the socialist revolution can and should be developed in a vital way, in light of the experiences of May '68, beginning with these points;

The signification of the struggle *against bureaucratic-capitalist culture*, which should become an attack against the foundations of modern "civilization": against the separation of productive work from leisure; against the absurdity of consumer society; against the monstrosity of contemporary cities; against the effects of the absolute scission between manual labor and intellectual work, and

so forth. All this is simmering within the population but, outside of “intellectual” circles, it has not reached the point of articulation and expression.

4. To participate in, and to push as far as possible, the demolition of the bourgeois University, and to transform it, as far as this can be done, into a center for contesting the established disorder. One must settle down without illusions and without hesitation to this task of capital importance. Self-management of the University has an exemplary character. What will remain of it in the long term matters little if the movement ebbs; and if the movement resumes, it will again be a basis for starting things up. The self-management of the University can and should become an unhealable wound on the flanks of the bureaucratic system, a permanent catalyst in the eyes of laboring people.
5. To drive into a corner the bureaucratic and political apparatuses, which already have been shaken by demands for self-management. Whenever someone puts himself forward as a “leader” or a “representative,” he must be asked the question, “From where and from whom do you derive your power? How did you obtain it? How do you exercise it?” At this important juncture, laboring people should be encouraged to join the CFDT⁷ (without leaving any illusions about trade unions as such) because it is less bureaucratized, and more permeable at its base to the movement’s ideas. Also and above all, they must join it in order to raise the following question and demand: Self-management is good not just for the outside world; is it not just as good, within the trade-union branch, for the local union, for the national union federation, and for the confederation of national unions?

The Stages of the Crisis

It is certainly not our intention to write the history of the struggles of the past few weeks. However, certain elements of their overall signification, which seem to be not generally recognized and whose import surpasses the immediate situation, must be laid out.

The crisis went through four clearly distinct phases:

1. *From May 3 to 14.* The student movement, until then limited to Nanterre, suddenly broadened its scope, drew in the whole country, and, after the street battles during the night of May 11 and the demonstration on the thirteenth, culminated in the general occupation of the universities.
2. *From May 15 to 27.* Beginning at Sud-Aviation (Nantes), spontaneous strikes including factory occupations broke out and spread rapidly. It was only on the afternoon of the seventeenth, after the spontaneous work stoppages at the Renault-Billancourt automobile factory, that the trade-union leaders jumped on the bandwagon and managed to take control of the movement, finally concluding the Grenelle Accords with the government.
3. *From May 28 to 30.* After the workers’ brutal rejection of the Grenelle Accords swindle, the trade-union leaders and the “left-wing” parties tried to shift prob-

lems onto the level of “political” wheeling and dealing. Meanwhile, the decomposition of the governmental and state apparatus was reaching its peak.

4. *Starting May 31.* The ruling strata pulled themselves together, de Gaulle dissolved the Assembly and threatened the strikers. Communists, Socialists, and Gaullists agreed to play the electoral farce. Meanwhile, the trade-union leaders reneged on their general “prerequisite conditions” for any negotiations, and tried to conclude agreements as fast as possible sector by sector. The police took on the task of reoccupying workplaces, beginning with the public-service sector.

The *first stage* of the crisis is dominated exclusively by the student movement. Let us not reiterate the signification of this fact but instead indicate the reasons for the student movement’s extraordinary effectiveness.

The reasons for the student movement’s extraordinary effectiveness can be found first of all in the radical content of its political objectives. Whereas for years the official student unions and the “left-wing” parties had been begging for nickels and dimes (student grants, meeting places, etc.), the Nanterre students, later followed by the students of the whole country, raised [two relevant] questions: “Who is Master in the University?” and “What is the University?” They answered: “We want to be its masters and to make something different of it than what it presently is.” Whereas for years people had been moaning that the percentage of sons of workers in the University was very small—as though, in countries where the percentage is higher, the University and society had changed their character!—they opened the University to the laboring population. Whereas for years people had been asking for more professors [*maîtres*], they now began to question the very relationship between teachers and students. They thus attacked the bureaucratic-hierarchical structures of society right where they seemed most strongly based on common sense, right where the sophism that knowledge endows one with a right to power (and that power, by definition, possesses knowledge) seemed unassailable. If, however, first-year students can have, upon deliberation, a vote and as much say in their curricula and teaching methods as world-renowned professors, on what grounds dare one deny workers in a business enterprise the right to manage their work, which they know better than anyone else, or the members of a trade union the direction of struggles that concern and involve only them? (This, much more than the presence of anti-Stalinist militants in the student movement, explains the bitterness and the hatred the Communist party and the CGT⁸ have exhibited toward the movement from its inception; they immediately sensed it as a challenge to their own bureaucratic nature.) For years a “modernization” (in the bureaucratic-capitalist sense) of their curricula had been timidly suggested; the students have attacked the substance and the content of a university education, and by their acts they have denounced the myth (resurrected a few years ago by a strange set of “Marxists”) of a neutral science that should have nothing to do with ideology.

At the same time, this radical content appeared not in words but in deeds, through effective methods of struggle. Cutting short all the “traditionally approved” methods—useless talk, negotiations, pressure tactics, coming and goings in and out of the trade unions, as well as illusory “takeovers” of the latter—the students passed to direct action, knowing how to choose the most favorable terrain in each instance.

Finally, the nonbureaucratic, nontraditional nature of the movement's organization played a key role: collective decisions made on the spot with everyone participating in their execution, the lifting of prohibitions and the elimination of political suspicions, and leaders emerging as action takes place.

It must also be said here, however, that the effectiveness of the movement, on the three levels described, was also linked to the *concrete conditions* from which it sprang and within which it maintained its effectiveness up to the occupation of the universities. Now, its weakness in the succeeding stages was due to its attempt to transpose, practically en bloc, the objectives, the forms of action and of organization that had been so successful on their first terrain, onto the level of society in general and of the totality of its problems. This attempt could only fail, and it led the movement to the very brink of isolation and an acceleration of its tendency merely to revolve around itself.

We do not mean that these ideas are valid only on the university level (or only within an organic setting of some kind); rather, that they cannot be mechanically transposed elsewhere without their signification being totally inverted. To transpose them in a fruitful way requires reflection. Otherwise, it is just repetition—the bureaucracy of thought to which the refusal to think inevitably leads. Attempts at mechanical transposition were made possible and continue to be nourished today by a false image of social reality, by a lack of understanding of modern capitalism, in which the mythology of “workerism” plays a preponderant role. The student movement has acted almost all the time as though the working class were just one great revolutionary powder keg and as though the sole problem consisted merely in finding a good spot to place the fuse.

The *second stage* of the movement should have shown to everyone, beginning Monday, May 20, that this was not so. Of course, the student battles, the occupation of university buildings, and the breakdown of the government induced the spontaneous strike movements at Sud-Aviation in Nantes (May 15), as well as at the Renault works in the provinces and even at Billancourt. Because of this, the trade-union leadership groups, and notably the CGT, had to do a 180-degree about-face in the space of a few days, and change from open hostility toward the student movement and from tagging along behind the strike movement to “supporting” the first and hemming in the second. They thus succeeded in winning total control over the strike movement until the conclusion of the Grenelle Accords. It would be desperately naive, however, to see this control as a mere result of the attitude of the trade-union leadership groups—as though the workers did not exist. What must be understood first and foremost is that once the strikes were touched off, the attitude of the trade-union leadership groups was in no respect questioned by the workers at the grass roots. At no time, in no place, did one see even the remotest similarity to the radical challenge to established relations that took place even in the traditionally archconservative sectors of the University (Law, Medicine, Political Science, etc.). Nor was there any questioning of the relations of production within capitalist business enterprises, of the alienation one experiences in one's work whatever one's salary level, of the division between directors and executants established between trained staff [*cadres*] and working people, or between leaders and the grass roots of “working-class” organizations.

It is of capital importance to point out firmly and calmly that in France, in May 1968, the industrial proletariat was not the revolutionary vanguard of this society; it was the lumbering rear guard. If the student movement actually mounted an assault on the heavens, what held society down to the ground on this occasion was the attitude of the proletariat, its passivity toward its own and the regime's leaders, its inertia, its feelings of indifference toward everything that does not directly concern economic demands. If the clock of history were to freeze in May 1968, one would have to say that the most conservative and the most mystified sector of society, the one most ensnared and entrapped in the webs of modern bureaucratic capitalism, was the working class, and more especially the section of the working class that follows the Communist party and the CGT. Its sole aim was to improve its situation *within* consumer society. It did not imagine that even this improvement might be achieved through autonomous action. The workers went on strike, but they left to the traditional organizations the direction of the strike, the definition of its objectives, and the choice of its methods of action. Quite naturally, such methods became methods of inaction. When the history of the May events is written, it will be found that a sector of workers, in some company or other, in some province or other, did attempt to go further. The overwhelming sociological picture [*image*], however, is certain and clear; the workers were not even physically present. Two or three days after the beginning of the strikes, the occupation of factories—whose meaning rapidly changed, the trade-union bureaucracies turning this occupation into a way of sealing off the workers, thus preventing them from being contaminated by the students—essentially, and in the great majority of instances, became occupation by CP/CGT functionaries [*cadres*] and militants.

This picture is not altered by the fact—a very important one for the future—that thousands of young workers, acting as individuals, joined the students and exhibited a different attitude. Nor is it altered by the fact that the workers rejected en masse the Grenelle Accords. These agreements were a swindle pure and simple *on the economic level*. No matter how mystified the workers may have become, they still know how to add and subtract. The picture is confirmed, on the other hand, by the fact that from May 31 onward, when the police first attempted to reoccupy the factories, only rarely did they meet with resistance of any kind.

As revolutionaries, it is not for us to pass moral judgments on the attitude of the working class, still less to write it off as a loss once and for all. What we must do, however, is to understand. We must strongly condemn the workerist mythology that has exerted and continues to exert a disastrous influence within the student movement (and in left-wing groupuscules, though there it matters little). It is indispensable to maintain and to deepen the contacts established with the workers, to broaden them as far as possible, and to try to show to the whole of the working class the profound signification of the student movement. Likewise, it was and it remains catastrophically wrong-headed to believe that, in the immediate future, one only has to rock the boat a little bit harder to swing the proletariat over to the side of the revolution.

We have to understand what lies at the bottom of the proletariat's attitude: an adherence to modern capitalist society, privatization, the refusal to envisage taking charge of collective matters, and the race toward ever-higher levels of consumption

are the key factors. Acceptance of the hierarchy—be it at work or in the union and in politics—passivity and inertia, and the limitation of demands to economic issues correspond to these factors as the negative to the positive. To understand this we must understand what modern capitalism is, and go beyond a moribund traditional Marxism, which continues to dominate the minds of many living beings.

We must also go beyond the traditional conceptions, desperately superficial as they are, concerning the nature of the “working-class” bureaucracy and the basis for its hold over the workers. Not only is it not a question of “errors” or of “betrayal” on the part of “working-class” bureaucrats, or of their making “mistakes” (except in the technical sense in which, like a state apparatus, they can make a false move, one against their own interests), or of their “betraying” anyone, since they play the part that is theirs within the system, but it is equally false to ascribe the working class’s attitude to their hold over it. Of course, decades of Stalinist mystification and terror, as well as the mystifications, maneuvers, and methods of intimidation still practiced today by these apparatuses contribute to the formation of this attitude. Nevertheless, if the workers had shown a tenth of the autonomous activity displayed by the students, the bureaucratic apparatuses would have been shattered to pieces. This the apparatuses know and it is in this light that we can understand their attitude throughout the May events. Their intense *fear* was visible through their maneuverings, lies, false accusations, contradictions, daily changes of opinion, and perpetual acrobatics, and it has ruled and still rules their actions; it is this fear that explains their haste to conclude the Grenelle Accords with the government, and then to shift the problems onto the false electoral terrain as soon as was possible.

At the same time—and here light is shed on the workers’ attitude as well as on the present situation of the bureaucratic apparatus—the hold of these “leadership” groups over the grass roots has grown as weak as is possible. Throughout the crisis the managerial bureaucratic apparatus, and that of the CP and the CGT in particular, has shown itself to be a rigid carcass surviving its own death. Its relationship with its supporters has become almost purely electoral. Up to and including Friday, May 24, the CP/CGT demonstrations in Paris gathered fifty to sixty thousand people at most, that being a *tenth* of the Communist electorate in the Paris region. One Communist voter in ten bothered himself to go demonstrate “peacefully” when the country was in the throes of a general strike and when the question of who should hold power was objectively being posed. There is hardly any room for nuancing this analysis in the light of the far bigger May 29 demonstration that attracted people from all over Paris, but who were quite happy simply to chant over and over again the CP’s slogans at the time when the disorder and the decomposition of the regime had reached their height. What are the CP and CGT at present? An apparatus full of functionaries from political and labor-union “organizations” and from capitalist institutions (deputies to the National Assembly, mayors, city councillors, full-time politicians and trade unionists, the staff of the Party’s and the CGT’s newspapers, employees of Communist municipalities, etc.), followed by a large political and trade-union electorate, which is as passive as it is inert. The type of relationship it maintains with this electorate is of the same kind as the one de Gaulle entertains with his: both vote for their respective leaders in order to be “left in peace.” Be it

politics or economic demands, they vote so that they no longer have to busy themselves with their own business.

What still separates the CP/CGT bureaucratic apparatus from the traditional social-democratic one is first of all its methods. Instead of saccharine reformist hypocrisy—and in spite of the attempts of people like [Roger] Garaudy,⁹ who would like to see it adopt such a policy—it continues to hurl slanders, brandish police provocation (the CGT endorsed Pompidou's statements about "foreign agitators"; a CGT strike picket in Lyon on the evening of May 24 turned over to the police a group of students coming from Nanterre) and physical attacks (CGT strike picketers at Billancourt prevented CFDT union representatives from entering the factory; cf. also the statements made by [CFDT General Secretary Eugène] Descamps in *Le Monde* concerning "a return to the period of 1944–46").¹⁰

This continuation of the Stalinist totalitarian style is consonant with other deep-seated characteristics of the present state of the French Communist party. Prisoner of its past, the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus, in France like almost everywhere else, is incapable of bringing about the turnaround that, in theory, would permit it to play a new role. Certainly not a revolutionary role, but the role of the huge modern reformist bureaucracy of which French capitalism has need in order to function, and which benevolent advisers, knowing sociologists, and crafty technicians have been proposing for years. Blocked on its own evolutionary path by its historical origins and by its constant reference to the Russian model, which for it remains indispensable—though both are becoming heavier and heavier crosses to bear—at the same time it is blocking the "normal" operation of French capitalism. In order to preserve its cohesion and its specificity, it has to maintain the "seizure of power" as its ultimate goal—for those at the summits of the apparatus, the hope to accede to the position of ruling stratum of society; for those at the base, a vague notion of a "passage to socialism" that supports them in their faith, makes them swallow anything and everything, and provides them with a good conscience. At the same time, however, they know perfectly well that this goal is not realizable outside the context of a world war. "Revolutionary" and "reformist" in words, it is in reality *neither* the one *nor* the other, and only with difficulty does it manage to hide the contradiction in which it is floundering, under its pitiful "theory" of the multiple paths to socialism. Incapable for these reasons of blending in with the thrice-over illusionary reformism of the SFIO¹¹—which its own existence as a matter of fact makes that much more illusory—it remains unacceptable to the SFIO, which fears being swallowed up by it, and it cannot even make a lasting alliance with these reformists. Result of the many archaic aspects of French life, and in its turn the cause of their perpetuation, unbelievably monstrous relic of a Russian past in a French present, it will probably fall only at the same time and by the same hands as French capitalism.

Today's events, however, are putting it to a difficult test. First of all, something has happened to it for the first time in history, something it has always done everything—including assassination—to avoid: it has been overtaken on its left by large-scale movements—the students, on the one hand, and even the CFDT with the self-management issue, on the other. Next, it has found itself cruelly caught between the acuteness of the social and political crisis, which has objectively raised the question of power, and its own inability to put forward any political aim *whatsoever*. As

we have already indicated, the present French CP is neither willing nor able to assume power; it knows that it would be accepted in a "Popular Front" government only on the condition that it pay for the costs of the operation (i.e., that it take responsibility for the high costs this government would incur, without having any access to the ministries that would permit it to infiltrate the state apparatus). It knows, too, that the only other conceivable way of assuming power would be through a civil war that would rapidly degenerate into a third world war, an option Moscow absolutely vetoes. The only thing left for the CP to do is to go on maneuvering, pretending it wants a "popular government." What it fears most is that such a government would actually be formed. And in case of an electoral victory, it is praying (and this has every chance of happening) that the [Socialist] Federation¹² will betray it to form a "center-left" government. The CP's line is reduced to this: lose as few feathers as possible, or maybe even gain a few. And it is indeed likely that as a result of the general reawakening of political consciousness prompted by recent events, the CP will make up its losses among young workers, students, and intellectuals by gaining a clientele among a hitherto apolitical or petit-bourgeois segment of the population. However, this situation renders the French CP's Stalinist apparatus at once harder and more brittle than before. Above all, it henceforth puts this apparatus on the defensive.

This situation explains the CP's haste to put everything back in order, as it also explains the CGT's role in the unbelievable swindle of the Grenelle Accords. Never before had the eagerness of the trade-union bureaucracies to sell out the mass movement for a spoonful of rotten pottage reached such extremes. [CGT leader] Benoît Frachon¹³ boasted on the radio of the fact that there were three times as many strikers as in June 1936. Well, in '36 the strikers immediately obtained the forty-hour week and two weeks paid vacation, considerable trade-union rights, and a substantial increase in real wages—all of this being, Alfred Sauvy¹⁴ has calculated, the equivalent of a 35 to 40 percent increase in real pay. No lies, no sophistries from Séguy will eliminate the fact that in May 1968 he stood in front of the workers and asked them to accept what was nothing more than a set of sheer negotiation promises and—except for the increase in the guaranteed minimum wage, which applies only to about 7 percent of salaried workers, agricultural workers included—an in fact negative wage "increase." The 10 percent they were granted is really only 7.75 percent (since the 7 percent increase applies to three-quarters of the year, the 10 percent increase being applicable only to the last quarter). Now, each year, and without strikes, wage rates in France go up by an average of 6 percent, according to official figures—and actual increases (including bonuses, the hierarchical "bracket creep," etc.) reach 7 percent. Would people really have gone on a general strike a fortnight just to gain 1 or 2 percent more? Not even this, for the unpaid strike days push this margin onto the negative side (two weeks of unpaid work bring annual wages down by 4 percent), not to mention all that the State has taken from wage earners during the last nine months, first with the new Social Security rules (the increased contributions and the lower reimbursements are officially estimated to be approximately 1 percent of total wages) and then with the extension of the value added tax to retail commerce (which caused in January a 1-percent-above-"normal" rise in prices), not to mention the price hike the bosses will "pass along" to working people under the

pretext of this imaginary increase in wages, not to mention, above all, the “need” for “productivity” increases, namely, work speedups, for which the bosses are already clamoring and about which Séguy has not breathed a word from the inception of the strike to its conclusion.

To appreciate correctly the objective situation, the irrationality, the incoherency, and the fear of capitalist *and* trade-union “leaders,” as well as the absurdity of the traditional analyses, we must insist upon the following point: in economic terms, French capitalism *could* and *can* grant a real increase in the actual buying power of wage earners of between 5 and 10 percent *beyond* the rate it would in any case have granted in 1968. Not only can it: it ought to, since on the whole such an increase would do it nothing but good (marginal businesses excluded). For years French industry has been working below its physical and human potential, to the extent that it could easily produce 5 or 10 percent more, with no greater cost than that of additional raw materials (a small proportion of a product’s ultimate value). This applies even more for those branches that would be the first to benefit from an increase in wages: consumer industries (textiles, household electrical appliances, automobiles, foodstuffs) and the building trades. These branches have for years had a higher-than-average percentage of unused capacities. Taking into account, once again, the normal, steady increases in annual wages, there existed, therefore, an objective basis for a compromise on a nominal wage increase of around 15 percent, everything included. *No redistribution of national income* would be involved: ideally, with a “good” reformist bureaucracy—one that would not, unlike the CGT, be above all *fearful*—the proletariat could have obtained such an increase; and as things stand, it probably would have been satisfied. It is not for economic reasons that this was not done: it was because the various factions of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy found it impossible to reach the point where, each faction for itself and all together, they could conduct themselves “rationally” from the point of view of their own interests.

The workers’ massive rejection of the Grenelle Accords—which, as a matter of fact, will force French capitalism to behave less irrationally, by granting some real increases—has opened the *third stage* of the crisis. During its brief existence, this stage has revealed the absolute political emptiness of French society, and it has created an original historical phenomenon: a duality of nonpower. On the one hand, we have the government and the party in power in utter decomposition, hanging upon the gasping breaths of a seventy-eight-year-old man without even believing much any longer in what he manages to utter. On the other hand, we have the intrigues and maneuvers of the “left-wing” Sganarelles,¹⁵ incapable even under these circumstances of proposing anything other than schemes for the formation of new governments and unable even to present themselves as “united.” The condition for this void: the total political inertia of the workers and salaried employees, who carried on the greatest strike ever recorded in the history of any country as a simple strike over economic demands; who refuse to see that a strike of this magnitude raises the question of power, of the organization, and even of the survival of society; who also do not see that the strike can continue only by becoming a “*strike for managerial power [grève gestionnaire]*”; and who confine themselves to feeble support for the vague slogan of “popular government,” which means placing matters back into the hands of the bureaucrats of “the Left.”

For them, as for their governmental “adversaries,” there is only one concern: that things return to a state of “normalcy” as soon as possible. With his May 31 speech, which opens the *fourth stage* of the crisis, the General once again offered them the way out. Behind his menacing rhetoric he promised to let them play once again their favorite game: electioneering. This explains the relief on the “Left” (so well described by *Le Monde’s* correspondent) after de Gaulle’s speech. Little matter that he then took advantage of the situation to correct his referendum blunder¹⁶ (51 percent “no” in the referendum makes 51 percent “no”; given the electoral gerrymandering, 51 percent of the vote for the opposition in the elections would still provide a majority for the [Gaullists of the] UNR¹⁷ and their allies among the independents, not to mention the possibility of enlarging to the center and even to the “Left” the range of Pompidou’s parliamentary support). There is total complicity—from Pompidou to Waldeck-Rochet, taking in Mitterrand¹⁸ and Mollet¹⁹ on the way—to transfer all problems onto the false terrain upon which these problems can, as they well know, neither be solved nor even posed: the parliamentary arena.

Immediately follows the stampede in retreat of the “tried and true leaders of the working class.” Without batting an eye, the “great tranquil force” that, according to Séguy, is the CGT allows the police to reoccupy workplaces one after another. The national trade-union federations withdraw their “precondition” that the ordinances²⁰ be repealed because, as Séguy explains with a straight face during his May 31 broadcast, Pompidou told him that the affair came under the jurisdiction of the National Assembly and could no longer be discussed, as the Assembly had been dissolved, but that the next Assembly would surely discuss it. . . . Eugène Descamps himself will make sure that the candidates pronounce themselves on this issue (but where the devil was he in 1956 when the Republican Front,²¹ which had come to power with a formal promise to end the Algerian War, instead intensified it?).

Suddenly, petit-bourgeois, nationalist, and reactionary France—whose existence some had forgotten in the previous weeks—breathed easier, seized hold of itself, and reappeared on the Champs Elysées.²²

The Future

One must not delude oneself about the coming weeks. They will be dominated by the ending of the strikes, the comedy of elections and of the new parliament, and even the summer holidays. And there is still the risk, amid this ebbing of protest, that the government will clamp down on the student movement and even reoccupy the universities. The student movement can guard against this risk only by organizing itself as quickly and as fully as possible, by effectively self-managing the universities, and by explaining to the population what it is doing.

Still less should one underestimate the immense possibilities the historical period now opening up will offer. The “tranquility” and the brutalization of modern capitalist society in France—and perhaps elsewhere—have been shattered for a long time to come. The “credit” of Gaullism is at an all-time low, and even if it survives for a while, its imaginary talisman is broken. The bureaucratic leadership groups that are used to enroll workers into the system have been profoundly shaken, and henceforth a deep crack separates them from the young workers. “Left-wing” politicians

have, and will have, nothing to say about the problems that have been raised. The simultaneously repressive and absurd character of the state apparatus and of the social system have been revealed on a massive scale. No one will forget it very soon. At every level, the “authorities” and “values” have been denounced, torn to pieces, and annihilated. Many years will pass before this enormous gaping breach in the edifice of bureaucratic capitalism will truly be filled back in—assuming it ever could be.

At the same time, fundamental ideas that were yesterday’s objects of ignorance or scorn are now known and discussed everywhere. By thousands and tens of thousands, new militants, who have broken radically with bureaucracy of all stripes, have been formed. Despite the limitations of its attitude in the course of events, the working class has been through a tremendous experience. It has relearned the meaning and the effectiveness of struggle. And it will be less and less content in the future with a few crumbs. Many incendiary hotbeds for further explosions will remain, in the universities certainly, among young workers too, and perhaps in factories and business firms where the idea of self-management will begin to make headway.

French society is faced with a long phase of disturbances, unrest, and upheavals. It is up to revolutionaries to assume their permanent and ongoing responsibilities.

The Originality of the May ’68 Crisis

There is a risk that the crisis of May ’68 will be measured by the yardstick of the past, reduced to significations and categories ready to hand, judged by excess and by default, by comparison with previously acquired experience—a risk already borne out, despite the claims of various commentaries. The protagonists themselves are not always the last to misapprehend the meaning of what they have wrought, and this should not surprise us. People rarely understand at the time that they are in the process of creating new frames of reference. Most often, the real signification of their creation becomes visible only when it has entered the imaginary solidity of the past; and the very fact of its lessened reality makes it then decisive [*déterminante*] for the future.

There is no need to dwell on the false comparisons of the French events to the Cultural pseudo-Revolution going on in China. Despite the intricate complexity of the situations, forces, and problems involved, this much is clear: the Maoist faction has launched a vast operation to reassert control over the bureaucratic apparatus, and they have not hesitated to appeal to the population against the opposing side. It goes without saying that a mobilization of this kind could not take place without attempts by the mobilized strata in a thousand different spots to take their own path. It is also clear, however, that the Maoist faction has on the whole maintained everywhere ultimate control over the situation.

To equate the revolutionary students’ criticism of consumer society in France with the Maoist denunciation of “economism” in China displays utter confusion. In the latter case, Stalinist delirium is combined with a will to divert the workers’ real demands toward what is now becoming in China a pseudopolitical opium of the people and with an attempt to distract popular criticism of the bureaucratic regime by setting up a scapegoat, a faction of the bureaucracy, for them to eliminate.

To make even the vaguest comparison between the students' criticism of the universities, of culture, and of the relationship between teachers and students in France with the denunciation of professors and of "dogmatism" and with the "free discussions" that take place in China is also to display utter confusion. The real meaning of the latter operation appears in the light of its ultimate goal: to impose upon 700 million people a new Bible, that grotesque little red book that contains the rules for all truth, past, present, and future.

The Cultural pseudo-Revolution in China is remote-controlled from start to finish by the Maoist faction, as R[obert] Guillaud aptly reminds readers of *Le Monde* (June 6, 1968).²³ It tirelessly denounces the "spontaneity cult" in the name of the one and only true thought—that of Mao. Finally, we should point out that the army, which is the final arbiter and the ultimate buttress of this whole process, has never been challenged. Its hierarchical structure intact, it remains both the pillar of bureaucratic society and the prime beneficiary of the crisis.

On the other hand, room should be made to dispel another false image of the May '68 crisis, for, let us repeat, it has not ceased to exert influence over the attitudes of many revolutionary students. This is the image of a failed or abortive proletarian socialist revolution. *Revolution*, because a sector of society has attacked the regime with radical goals in mind via methods of direct action; because the generalization of the strikes has given a national and all-inclusive dimension to the crisis, thereby objectively raising the question of power; and, lastly, because both government and administration have found themselves physically paralyzed and morally shattered. *Failed or abortive*, since the working class did not go on the attack against the powers that be—either because the bureaucratic apparatuses "prevented" it from playing its revolutionary role or because "conditions were not ripe," an expression that is of no value because it can be meant in any way whatsoever and however one pleases.

Taken separately, each one on its own, these statements are correct: there were features of a revolutionary situation, just as there was an absence of any political role on the part of the proletariat. Nevertheless, when one tries to fit the May events into a framework of a failed or abortive socialist revolution, when one judges what has been in relation to something that "might have been" and reconstructs what is happening on the basis of an image of what has been at another time and in another place instead of on the basis of reflection on the actual process and on its own intrinsic tendencies, one concocts a signification unrelated to the events.

To think of the May '68 crisis as a classical revolutionary crisis in which the principal actor did not play his appointed role is a total sham. This is not even to speak of a *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark; it is to speak of a *Hamlet* where the Prince is tortured not by the problem of avenging his father, but by that of purchasing a new jerkin to wear. What really happened was that *another* play was being performed. It is irrelevant that the actors, and particularly the lead part, played by the student movement, frequently repeated phrases and entire tirades taken from the classical repertoire that had only an apparent or an ambiguous relationship to the plot. This was the first great play by a new author, still probing his way, and the only public performances that have been staged so far were a few mere curtain raisers, at Berkeley, in Warsaw, and elsewhere. The play's central character has no predecessors among the classics. As always in the theater of history, it is a complex

and collective character, presented in a new guise and with unprecedented qualities. This character embodies youth, student youth in particular but not just student youth, and parts of the modern strata of society—especially the parts of the intelligentsia that have been integrated into its “culture”-producing structures. Of course, the reason why this character can create around itself real drama and animate this drama instead of giving rise to a mere incident is that it encounters other characters, themselves ready to take to the stage, like always, for motives and ends that are their own. Yet, as opposed to all theater, and as in the unique *King Lear*, the play is *history*, in that several separate and heterogeneous plots [*intrigues*] are woven together, and forced by events, time, and a common pole, to interact [*interférer*].

This common pole (here, opposition to the government) establishes a similarity between the May '68 crisis and the classical revolutions of the past two centuries. This similarity, however, is only apparent; it continues to mask two differences of much greater importance, just as it has done throughout the crisis. In a classical revolution, those groups fighting to *eliminate* the established regime are originally united. Their differences come to the surface and even become brutal conflicts once this common objective has been attained and the question of what kind of regime should replace it has been raised. This, by the way, is what gives them the clear-cut features of a permanent revolution (in the strict sense intended by Marx and Trotsky, and not in the vague sense in which it has been bandied about in the past few weeks). Once the initial, the least radical objectives of the revolution have been attained, the latent oppositions between the revolutionary protagonists become apparent, for now some strata are transformed into conservative guardians of the new order, and others, the most oppressed, are thus forced to turn to even more radical aims and actions.

The situation in May '68 is totally different. The students and workers were not even united on a negative objective. Among the students, at least among their revolutionary and active elements, the negative objective of opposition to the government was understood in a different sense than it was by the workers. For the former, the aim is to eliminate the government, whereas the great majority of workers, even though they do not favor the government, are absolutely unprepared to work toward its overthrow. A worker/student alliance cannot materialize under these conditions; it remains a mere wish, based upon a misunderstanding.

For this very reason, the crisis presents the paradoxical appearance of a permanent revolution filmed, if one may say so, twice in reverse. It begins with radical objectives and methods of action and advances backward toward discussions over percentages and toward surrender to the police without resistance of occupied buildings. Beginning with the revolt of a relatively privileged portion of society, which bears within itself and puts forth revolutionary demands, it induces the least favored strata of society to enter into action, but merely with limited, reformist demands. The enormous physical weight of millions of strikers, added to the disarray of the top leaders, thus creates a social crisis, but the very fact that this crisis really raises the question of power (which the mass of workers did not want at any moment to envisage), instead of deepening the crisis, facilitates its swift withdrawal toward the imaginary space of electoral activity.

To try to comprehend the specificity and the originality of the May '68 crisis is

to try to elucidate the signification of the respective behaviors of the two social groups that acted it out.

The working class's attitude cannot be chalked up to local factors; with minor alterations, it corresponds to a process that has been going on in all industrialized countries over the past twenty years. It is neither coincidental nor simply the effect of a screen the "working-class" bureaucracies would have placed between the proletariat and the revolution. We will not repeat what we already have said above on this subject, nor is this the place to return to analyses that have been made for a long time.²⁴ Yet, we must recall briefly the factors that have made the proletariat a revolutionary class for one hundred and fifty years, and the essential characteristics of its present historical situation.

To be brief: the proletariat's action—continuous and multiform, economic and political, "informal" and organized, reformist and revolutionary—on society has profoundly transformed society, but this action on society has remained, until now, inadequate to the task of revolutionizing it.

The proletariat has been a revolutionary class. Eighteen forty-eight and 1871 in Paris, 1905 and 1917 in Russia, 1919 in Germany and Hungary, 1925 and 1927 in China, 1936 to 1937 in Spain, 1956 in Poland and Hungary are neither our dreams nor our theories, but crucial events, switch plates in modern history. The proletariat has been the revolutionary class, not because Marx assigned it this role, but because of its real situation in production, in the economy and in society in general.

This situation is at the outset the one capitalism imposes, or aims at imposing: the transformation of the worker into an object; the destruction of the meaning of work at the point of production; material poverty and periodic unemployment in the economic sphere; exclusion from political life and from culture in the social realm. At the same time, the capitalist system—and this is its specific historical feature—permits, and even *forces* the proletariat to fight against the situation in which it finds itself.

Thus an unremitting combat begins at the point of production, and continues throughout the workday, against the capitalist organization of labor, its methods, its norms, its bureaucratic-mechanistic pseudorationality. This combat is embodied in the existence of "informal" groups as necessary units of production, in a parallel organization of the production process, and in an actual collectivization of workers opposed to the atomization the capitalist division of labor aims at imposing upon them. And it culminates in the objective of workers' management, an objective put forward during the revolutionary phases of this combat. On the economic level, there are struggles over economic demands; and on the political and social level, political struggles have succeeded over the past century in bringing about considerable transformations of the proletariat's situation, as well as of capitalism itself. Modern society is essentially a product of a century of class struggle. Never in history has there been another example of an oppressed and exploited class whose action has had similar results.

At the same time, however, we should note that the proletariat has not been able to revolutionize society or to instaurate its own power. Whether or not one adds "until now," this remains a crucial point.

One cannot really begin to reflect on this question until one understands the *con-*

tradition that dominates the situation of the proletariat. Insofar as it has struggled against the essence of the system and not against accidental or external features of capitalism, it is a revolutionary class. The proletariat has struggled directly against the system not merely when it denies or negates this system but also when it *posits* the elements of a new social organization and the principles for a new civilization, both in the daily life of the factory and in its activity during the revolutionary phases of the struggle. And yet the proletariat has not been able to integrate, or to institute, or to retain these elements and to uphold these principles. Whenever the issue of going beyond the informal level has arisen, the proletariat has fallen back during this acute moment of the struggle, during this revolutionary phase, into the representational schemata, the methods of making/doing [*modes du faire*], and the institutional models of the dominant civilization. The mass trade-union and political organizations have thus aligned themselves with the structures and modes of operation of all the bureaucratic organizations that have ever been produced by capitalism; and where the proletarian revolution has seized power, this power has been abandoned, handed over to a “leading party” that is “representative” of the working class; the ideology and the practice of hierarchy wins increasing acceptance, and finally the entire capitalist philosophy of organization for the sake of organization and consumption for the sake of consumption seems to have penetrated into the proletariat.

Of course, all that might be chalked up to capitalism’s hold over the proletariat and to the difficulty the latter experiences in breaking loose. Considered in historical terms, however, this “difficulty” refers us to something else—indeed, something known for a long time but never given adequate consideration. The proletariat does not and cannot create its own society within capitalist society, its own positive frames of reference and institutions that would remain under its control—as the bourgeoisie more or less succeeded in doing under the Ancien Régime. Thus, what it creates, it immediately loses. And this is the worst of losses. Its creations are not stolen from it but rather put to another use, diametrically opposed to the one for which they had been intended. It is not, as Kautsky and Lenin said, arguing from a false premise to reach a pernicious conclusion, that the proletariat is unable on its own to raise itself above a trade-union consciousness and thus should be inculcated with a “socialist” ideology produced by petit-bourgeois intellectuals. Such an ideology can only be, and in fact has only been, profoundly bourgeois. If there is anything that can guide us in reconstructing a revolutionary viewpoint, it can lie only in the truly socialist elements of such a viewpoint that the proletariat itself has produced in its activity *against* this pseudosocialist ideology. Yet these elements, which can be found in the obscurity of the informal organization on the shop floor and in workers’ behavior at the point of production, as well as in revolutionary explosions, cannot maintain themselves, or develop, or, above all, be *instituted*. This is what has been called, in philosophical language, the proletariat’s “negativity.” Marx had already seen it and discussed it at length, except that he complemented this negativity with an (imaginary) positivity, that of the “laws of history.”

But of course, negativity as pure negativity is only an abstraction, and therefore, at bottom a piece of speculative mystification. No historical class can be pure, absolute negativity. After every revolutionary crisis the proletariat has only been able

to fall back onto something “positive.” As there was nothing solid to fall back on that would continue to provide material support, in an instituted form, to the revolutionary aim, inevitably it fell back upon the “positive” aspects of capitalism. As it could not fall back on a culture of its own, it fell back upon the existing culture. As the norms, values, and goals that have been its own at the height of its activity literally *have no meaning* in the daily life of capitalist society, it just had to adopt those of that society.

And this is, as a matter of fact, the *actual result* of the working-class struggles of the past hundred and fifty years. The result has exactly the same signification whether one examines the bureaucratization of “working-class” organizations or the “integration” of the proletariat into the process of capitalist expansion. Acceptance of bureaucratic organizational standards is just the flip side of the acceptance of capitalist goals in life, for they imply one another in philosophy, and they lean upon each other in reality. With these trade unions one can obtain only 5 percent, and if it is 5 percent that one wants, these unions will do.

Thus the age-old struggle of a revolutionary class has for the moment come to this doubly paradoxical result: the “integration” of the proletariat into modern capitalist society – and its entry into this society at the moment when the dominant mode of socialization is privatization.

What, then, is the present historical situation of the proletariat in modern countries, and what remains, beyond memories and ideological leftovers, of what made it a revolutionary class? Nothing specific remains. Nothing, certainly, from the quantitative point of view: in a typical industrialized country, 80 to 90 percent of the active population are dependently employed wage earners or salaried employees, but only 25 to 40 percent are *workers*; generally speaking, the industrial proletariat no longer constitutes a majority of those dependently employed, and its relative weight continues to decline. (The situation is still otherwise in countries like France or Italy, where a strong rural population is in the process of being absorbed by the towns, and hence also by industry, but even in these countries the ceiling for the industrial labor force will soon be reached.) Nothing remains from the qualitative point of view, either. Capitalism succeeds in satisfying the proletariat’s economic demands one way or another; in fact, it has to satisfy these demands in order to continue functioning. The proletariat is not the only one to experience alienation in work and the wear and tear of consumer society; all strata of society experience it. We are even justified in asking ourselves whether these experiences are not felt even *more* acutely outside the proletariat, properly speaking. Categories of people in less unfavorable income brackets can attain more easily the stage of consumer saturation, can uncover more quickly the absurdity of this constant race toward always having something more, something else. Alienation in work and the irrationality and incoherency of bureaucratic “organization” can more readily be perceived by those strata that work outside the realm in which material goods are produced. At least within this realm the laws of matter themselves set a limit on bureaucratic absurdity, whereas bureaucratic absurdity tends to expand toward infinity in areas where non-physical activities are performed, for in the latter case it needs no soil, it encounters no physical obstacles. This is precisely what became apparent in May ’68 through

the revolutionary role played by the young, in particular the students, and through the action of a large number of teachers and intellectuals.

The role played by young people must be reexamined and its permanent and universal signification understood. The traditional frameworks of sociological thought (including Marxism) must be shattered. It must be pointed out that in modern societies youth, as such, is a *social category* underpinned by a division within society that is, in certain respects, more important than its division into classes.

Traditional criteria for explaining social divisions have lost their hold over hierarchical, bureaucratic, and multipyramidal social structures like those found in modern societies. Not only does property no longer have a simple and straightforward meaning, but even the division between directors and executants is breaking down: except at society's two extremes, a growing proportion of the population finds itself playing composite roles or living and working in intermediary situations. Income is ceasing to be a criterion—actually, it never was one. For purposes of reflection and sociopolitical practice, the relevant social division no longer can be based upon “status” or “estates,” but on behavior patterns; and the former are less and less the univocally determining factors of the latter. The relevant division today is between those who accept the system as such and those who reject it.

Now, it is among the young as such that rejection of the system can be, and is, the most radical. This is so for a host of reasons, two of which are immediately evident. First of all, because of the profound crisis, anthropological in character, that the system is undergoing, the crumbling of frameworks, of values, and of imperatives has a particularly virulent effect on the young, for they are at the stage when personality is still gelling, seeking its orientation, and finding only the emptiness of what exists today. Furthermore, the relatively well-off material situation of almost all strata of society means that individual young people have not yet been caught in the traps of the system, let alone in its subtle mechanisms of psychoeconomic constraint. Now, perhaps the most important characteristic of today's youth movement is that, as a function of and on the basis of this “nonattachment”²⁵ and this “irresponsibility” that society imposes upon youth, the young reject *both* this society *and* this “nonattachment” and “irresponsibility” *at the same time*. And their activity and their goal of self-management give shape to this rejection.

It would be completely superficial, however, to see in this “nonattachment” and this “irresponsibility” only a transitory state of certain individuals at one stage in their lives. This state, while transitory for persons, is a permanent state for society. If you take the ten to fifteen statistically most numerous age classes in the population, you obtain about a third of the population that counts in social struggles (if not in elections). But this “nonattachment” and this “irresponsibility” (and also their virtual rejection) are a universal characteristic of man in modern society.

If indeed students in particular, and young people more generally, really have become a pole of revolutionary social action, they are so as the embodiment in its extreme form, and the typification in its purest state, of the general and profound condition of the modern individual. For today everyone is reduced to the situation of “nonattachment”: only externally imposed habits tie them to jobs, ways of living, and norms of behavior that they no longer internalize or value. Everyone is reduced to a situation of “irresponsibility,” since everyone is subject to an authority that no

longer dares even to assert itself as authority: everyone has formal, empty "rights" but no real power; everyone has some ridiculous job, more and more perceived as such; everyone's life is becoming filled with fake objects; everyone finds himself in a state of relative material "security" coupled with an anxiety "over nothing" [*sans objet*].

The general "proletarianization" of modern society is a fact—but an ambiguous one. If everyone has become a dependently employed wage earner or salaried employee, at the same time almost everyone has escaped poverty and insecurity.

The general "juvenilization" of society is just as certain, but much less ambiguous. Everyone has become nonattached and irresponsible, and people's only choice is to recognize or fool oneself about this. At the limit, governmental ministers can play at being ministers; they know very well that they really decide nothing and that they are not truly responsible for anything.

The student condition is, then, exceptional only in the sense that in it are condensed in pure form the most essential characteristics of the situation of modern man. Influenced certainly by the remnants of classical revolutionary ideology—in what it retains that is most *true* and, at the same time, most *abstract* under modern conditions—the students have thus represented an *anticipated revolution*, and this in two senses. First of all, by struggling against their present situation, they were struggling as well and especially in anticipation against their future situation—not, as people in the government stupidly remarked, for fear of being unemployed but from their certain knowledge of the nature of the "employment" awaiting them. An anticipated revolution also in a deeper sense, insofar as it expresses and prefigures what could be, should be, and one day surely will be the revolution against modern society.

Next, one must reflect on the fact that the core of the crisis has not been youth in general, but student youth in the universities and high schools, and the young—or the nonpetrified—part of the teaching professions, but also other categories of intellectuals. This too has a signification that, due to its universality, will be decisive for the future.

To indulge in endless discussions on the revolution in science and technology is a complete waste of time if one does not comprehend what it entails: first of all, that the education and culture industries are now and henceforth of greater importance, both quantitatively and qualitatively, than the steel industry and all other metalworking industries combined. Nor will the education and cultural industries cease to grow in size and importance.

Next, and even more significant, are the problems posed on all levels by the profound crisis of contemporary knowledge and science. (The broad mass of scientists have not yet even realized that this crisis exists; they merely undergo this crisis in ways now obscure to them.) So as not to beat around the bush, we may speak of this crisis as the *death* of science in its classically accepted sense and in all hitherto known senses of the term. It is the *death* of a certain way in which knowledge is fabricated and transmitted. It concerns the perpetual uncertainty as to *what* knowledge has been ascertained, what is probable, doubtful, obscure. It involves the indefinitely extended collectivization of the human support network of knowledge and, at the same time, the fragmentation ad infinitum of this knowledge just at the moment

when the imperious and enigmatic interdependence, or more precisely, the articulated unity, of all fields of knowledge is becoming more apparent than ever. Also in question is the relationship of this knowledge to the society that produces it, nourishes it, is nourished by it, and risks dying of it, as well as the issues concerning for whom and for what this knowledge exists. Already at present these problems demand a radical transformation of society, and of the human being, at the same time that they contain its premises. If this monstrous tree of knowledge that modern humanity is cultivating more and more feverishly every day is not to collapse under its own weight and crush its gardener as it falls, the necessary transformation of man and society must go infinitely further than the wildest utopias have ever dared to imagine. This transformation will require the individual to develop from the outset in a quite different manner. Through such development, the individual will have to become capable on its own of entertaining another relationship with knowledge, a relationship for which there is no analogy in previous history. It is not simply a question of developing the individual's faculties and capacities. Much more profoundly, it is a matter of the individual's relationship to authority, since knowledge is the first sublimation of the desire for power and therefore of one's relationship to the institution and to everything that the institution represents as fixed and final point of reference. All this is obviously inconceivable without an upheaval not only in existing institutions but even in what we intend by institution.

This is what is contained, though for the moment only in germinal form, in the movement of revolutionary students in France. To be specific, what is involved is the transformation of the relationship between teacher and student; the transformation, too, of the content of teaching; the elimination of the tendency to partition off each academic discipline from all others and the university from society. Either all that will simply remain a dead letter—and it is difficult to see how it could remain just that—or else it will constantly and more and more imperiously raise the issue of the upheaval just mentioned. It matters little whether students know this or not (and they were in part aware of it). It matters little whether they saw their activity as prelude or as part of a classical socialist revolution—which it is in some sense, provided that one fully understands the upheaval in the very content of this revolution as it has been envisaged until now. Just as the slogan “to live working or to die fighting” contained in potential form the proletarian revolutions of the century that followed, the objectives set by the French student movement already are sketching out the lines of force for the historical period now opening before us.

Such are the “objective” exigencies, in the realm of knowledge, of our contemporary era. They broaden and deepen immensely those that already have arisen in the realms of production and social organization. Such are the factors that make of youth, the students, and workers in the teaching and culture industries the equivalent of a new revolutionary vanguard in society.

But even if these sectors were enlarged to take in all modern sectors of society in a comparable situation, would they be able to play this role? Will they not sooner or later encounter a contradiction symmetrical to the one the proletariat faced? In other words, can they in an enduring way escape the grasp of the culture into which they are born? Do they have sufficient weight and adequate cohesiveness to play a

historical role? Can they acquire this weight by joining in an alliance with manual workers—which today seems even more difficult than it was in the past?

Here it would be not only illusory but profoundly and in principle wrong to try to reply to these questions that history poses to people's creativity with a theoretical analysis. This much, however, is for us certain: if there is a solution to these problems, it cannot be found outside a joining of manual with intellectual workers. And if such a union—nothing less than “natural”—is to be achieved, it will be realized only through a permanent activity of social-political labor whose modalities, structures, and ways of being remain to be invented almost in their entirety.

Notes

1. T/E: The March 22nd Movement, a disparate grouping of various left-wing student activists, was the outgrowth of an occupation of the administration building at Nanterre University in a suburb of Paris on March 22, 1968. Nanterre University sociology student Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had been meeting with former S. ou B. members after the group's dissolution, participated in the occupation and soon became the most visible student leader of this movement and of the May 1968 events.

2. T/E: UNEF is the acronym for the Union nationale des étudiants de France, the National Union of French Students.

3. T/E: SNE Sup is the acronym for the National Union of Higher Education Instructors. Along with the UNEF, it called for a general strike to protest the police arrest of students at the Sorbonne on May 3 and the administration's subsequent suspension of classes.

4. T/E: The Grenelle Accords were signed on May 27, 1968, by the government and by trade-union leaders from the principal national labor confederations. Negotiations and the signing of the accords took place at governmental offices on the rue de Grenelle in Paris.

5. T/E: Georges Séguy (b. 1927) was the general secretary of the Communist-allied Confédération générale du travail (CGT), the General Labor Confederation, from 1967 until 1982.

6. T/E: Waldeck-Rochet (1905–1983) was general secretary of the French Communist party from 1964 until 1972.

7. T/E: CFDT is the acronym for the Confédération française démocratique du travail, the non-Communist French Democratic Labor Confederation, formed in 1964 when the majority of the Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens (CFTC, the French Confederation of Christian Workers) voted to become a secular labor organization. It is generally allied with the Socialists.

8. T/E: The CGT is the Communist-allied General Labor Confederation. See note 5 above.

9. T/E: Roger Garaudy (b. 1913) was a leading Communist intellectual and politician before his exclusion from the Party for his protest against the August 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.

10. T/E: Eugène Descamps (b. 1922) was general secretary of the CFDT from 1961 until 1971. During the “period of 1944–1946” to which he refers, Stalinist labor militants physically attacked workers who went on strike without CGT authorization.

11. T/E: The SFIO was the acronym for the Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière, a forerunner to the French Socialist party of today.

12. T/E: The Federation was the Fédération de la gauche démocrate et socialiste (FGDS), the Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left, which brought together the SFIO (see previous note) and the Radical party, fielding François Mitterrand as its presidential candidate in 1965.

13. T/E: Benoît Frachon (1892–1975) was general secretary of the CGT from 1944 until 1967.

14. T/E: Alfred Sauvy (1898–1990), a sociologist and demographer, directed the French National Institute of Demography.

15. T/E: Sganarelle is a character in several of Molière's plays who plays the part of a cuckold.

16. T/E: One of President Charles de Gaulle's first responses to the events of May 1968 was to propose a referendum on “participation.” He later withdrew even this vaguely worded response to the student and worker protests, opting instead, as Castoriadis explains, for the dissolution of the Parliament and the calling of new parliamentary elections.

17. T/E: The UNR is the acronym for the Union pour la Nouvelle République (the Union for the

New Republic), the political party-movement founded in 1958 in Algiers that supported General Charles de Gaulle in his return to power.

18. T/E: See note 12.

19. T/E: Guy Mollet (1905–1975) was general secretary of the SFIO (see note 11) from 1946 until 1969.

20. T/E: These ordonnances refer to 1967 governmental decrees concerning social security.

21. T/E: The Front républicain was an electoral coalition of non-Communist socialist and “radical” forces that won a large number of seats in the January 1956 legislative elections.

22. T/E: Timed to coincide with President Charles de Gaulle’s return to the offensive, a large demonstration of conservative opponents of the student and worker protests took place May 30 on the Champs-Élysées in Paris.

23. T/E: Robert Guillaud, “La Révolution culturelle chinoise a préfiguré sur certains points événements français,” *Le Monde*, June 6, 1968, pp. 1 and 12.

24. In the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, see especially “Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne” (nos. 31–33) and “Recommencer la révolution” (no. 35). [Now in *CMR* 2, pp. 47–258, and *EMO* 2, pp. 307–65; T/E: translated as “Modern Capitalism and Revolution” (*PSW* 2, pp. 226–315) and “Recommencing the Revolution” (chapter 3, this volume).]

25. T/E: The French word is *disponibilité*. To capture another aspect of this word, it could also be translated as “availability.”