The basic fact of life in capitalist society is the alienation of creative power. The alienated power of society is appropriated by a class. Concentrated in institutions — Capital, State, Police and Military — the power alienated by society becomes the power of the dominant class to control and oppress society. To the creators of the power, the institutions which control and oppress them seem like external forces, like forces of nature, permanent and immutable.

The alienation of creative power and the appropriation of that power takes place through the act of exchange.

The producer sells his labor; the capitalist buys the labor. In exchange for his labor the producer receives wages, namely money with which to buy consumer goods. The purchase and sale of labor in capitalist society reduces labor to a thing, a commodity, something which can be bought and sold. Once the labor is sold to the capitalist, the products of the labor "belong" to the capitalist, they are his "property." These products of labor include the means of production with which goods are produced, the consumer goods for which the producer sells his labor, and the weapons with which the capitalist's "property" is protected from its producers. The alienated products of labor then take on a life of their own. The means of production no longer appear as products of labor but as Capital, as objects and instruments which emanate from the capitalist, as the "property" of the capitalist. The consumer goods no longer appear as the products of labor but as the rewards of labor, as external manifestations of the stature, worth and character of an individual. The weapons no longer appear as products of labor, but as the natural and indispensable instruments of the State. The State no longer appears as a concentration of the alienated power of society, and its "law and order" no longer appear as a violent enforcement of the relations of alienation and appropriation which make its existence possible; the State and its repressive media appear to serve "higher" aims.

The two terms of the act of exchange (labor for wages, creative power for consumer goods) are blatantly unequal. They are un-

Worker-Student Action Committees. France May '68

Roger Gregoire & Fredy Perlman

1969

ism,"[13] the foreign students prepare to spread the example abroad. East European students express their solidarity and send the news to their comrades at home. A U.S. group forms an Action Committee of the American Left, and they "plan to establish a news link-up with the U.S.A."[14]

Most important of all, Censier's main contribution to the revolutionary movement, the worker-student action committees, are formed. "Workers" … "To destroy this repressive system which oppresses all of us, we must fight together. Some worker-student action committees have been created for this purpose."[15] The formation of the worker-student committees coincides with the outbreak of a wildcat strike: "In the style of the student demonstrators, the workers of Sud-Aviation have occupied the factory at Nantes."[16]

Revolutionary Consciousness of Social Power

The workers of a highly industrialized capitalist society suddenly cease acting "normally": they stop working, and they do not go out on an "ordinary" strike for material demands. They occupy their factories, and they begin to talk about expropriation.

To understand this radical break with the usual behavior of workers, it is necessary to understand that this unusual behavior is an ever-present *potentiality* in capitalist society. The existence of this potentiality cannot be understood in terms of the material conditions of the workers, but only in terms of the structure of social relations in capitalist society.

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[14] Leaflet: "Permanence Americaine," Centre Censier, May 17, 1968. In this leaflet, the American students also mention that they are willing to inform their French comrades of "attempts of students to organize workers" in the U.S. The Americans found very few action committee militants who were interested.

[15] Leaflet: "Travailleurs," Comité d'Action Etudiants-Travailleurs, Censier, May 16, 1968.

[16] Le Monde, May 16, 1968.

of their ability to do so, they must become conscious of their collective power. And this consciousness of collective power is precisely what the students and workers acquired after they occupied Censier and transformed it into a place for collective expression. Consequently, the occupation of Censier is an exemplary action, and the central task of the militants in Censier becomes to communicate the example. All the self-organized activities revolve around this central task. Former classrooms become workshops for newly formed action committees; in every room projects are suggested, discussed, and launched; groups of militants rush out with a project, and others return to initiate a new one.

The problem is to communicate, to spread consciousness of social power beyond the university. Everyone who has attended the general assemblies and participated in committee discussions knows what has to be done. Every action committee militant knows that the self-confidence in his own ability, the consciousness of his power, could not develop so long as others thought, decided and acted for him. Every militant knows that his action committee is able to initiate and carry out its projects only because it is a committee of conscious subjects, and not a committee of followers waiting for orders from their "leaders" or their "central committee."

Censier exists as a place and as an example. Workers, students, professors, townspeople come to the place to learn, to express themselves, to become conscious of themselves as subjects, and they prepare to communicate the example to other sections of the population and to other parts of the world. Foreign students organize a general assembly to "join the struggle of their French comrades and give them their unconditional support." Realizing that "the struggle of their French comrades is only an aspect of the international struggle against capitalist society and against imperial-

[13] Leaflet: "Assemblée Generale des Etudiants Etrangers," Centre Censier, May 20, 1968.

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paper are found, and a free printing service is organized. Townspeople — observers and potential participants — stream into Censier constantly and are unable to find their way around the complex social system which has started to develop within the building: an information window is maintained at the entrance and information offices are maintained on each floor to orient the visitors. Many militants live far from Censier: a dormitory is organized.

Censier, formerly a capitalist university, is transformed into a complex system of self-organized activities and social relations. However, Censier is not a self-sufficient Commune removed from the rest of society. The police are on the order of the day of every general assembly. The occupants of Censier are acutely aware that their self-organized social activities are threatened so long as the State and its repressive apparatus are not destroyed. And they know that their own force, or even the force of all students and some workers, is not sufficient to destroy the State's potential for violence.

The only force which can put the Censier occupants back to sleep is a force which is physically strong enough to break their will: the police and the national army still represent such a force.

The means of violence produced by a highly developed industry are still controlled by the capitalist State. And the Censier occupants are aware that the power of the State will not be broken until control over these industrial activities passes to the producers: they "are convinced that the struggle cannot be concluded without the massive participation of the workers."[12] The armed power of the State, the power which negates and threatens to annihilate the power of collective creation and self-organization manifested in Censier, can only be destroyed by the armed power of society. But before the population can be armed, before the workers can take control of the means of production, they must become aware

[12] Leaflet: "Travailleurs R.A.T.P.," Les Comités d'Action, Censier, May 15 (?), 1968.

specialized social activities are integrated into the lives of all members of the community. Social tasks are no longer performed either because of direct coercion or because of the indirect coercion of the market (i.e. the threat of poverty and starvation). As a result, some social activities, like hair dressing and manicuring, are no longer performed at all. Other tasks, like cooking, sweeping the rooms, cleaning the toilets — tasks performed by people who have no other choice in a coercive system — are left undone for several days. The occupation shows signs of degeneration: the food is bad, the rooms are filthy, the toilets are unusable. These activities become the order of the day of the general assembly: everyone is interested in their efficient performance, and no one is institutionally coerced to perform these tasks. The general assembly is responsible for their performance, which means everyone is responsible. Committees of volunteers are formed. A Kitchen Committee improves the quality of the meals; the food is free: it is provided by neighborhood committees and by peasants. A service of order charges itself with maintaining clean toilets stocked with toilet-paper. Each action committee sweeps its own room. The tasks are performed by professors, students and workers. At this point all of the occupants of Censier are workers. There are no longer upper and lower class jobs; there are no longer intellectual and manual tasks, qualified labor and unqualified labor; there are only socially necessary activities.

An activity which is considered necessary by a handful of occupants becomes the basis for the formation of an action committee. Each person is a thinker, an initiator, an organizer, a worker. Comrades are being seriously injured by cops in the street fights: a floor of Censier is transformed into a hospital; doctors and medical students care for the patients; others without medical experience help, cooperate and learn. A large number of comrades have babies and as a result cannot take part in activities which interest them: the comrades unite to form a nursery. The action committees need to print leaflets, announcements, reports: mimeograph machines and

Publication Details

Worker-Student Action Committees was first published by its authors in Kalamazoo (Michigan) in the spring of 1969 and then reprinted by Black & Red (Detroit) in 1970. (Printed at the Detroit Print Co-op which Perlman co-founded).

The articles making up Part I were all written in Paris between May and July 1968 except for the last which was completed in the US. Some of the articles were published at the time in different journals — details are given in the notes for those articles. In the pamphlet no previous publication details are given for the first article The Second French Revolution but according to the bibliography in '*Having Little, Being Much*' an article with that title was published in the Kalamazoo paper the *Western Herald* (June 14, 1968).

The 1970 Black & Red edition was copiously illustrated with cartoons and graphics created in France during May '68. This on-line version is considerably the poorer for not including them.

From *Having Little, Being Much* by Lorraine Perlman, Black & Red (Detroit), 1989:

[...Fredy Perlman lectured in Italy for a few weeks in the spring of 1968...]

> "When the course in Turin ended, Fredy took a train to Paris and found himself caught up in the tumultuous events of May 1968. His experiences during these intense, joyous weeks deeply affected his views and remained a constant reference point whenever he considered possibilities for social change. (...)
>
> The act of rebellion itself was exhilarating. The massive street actions in which thousands confronted the forces of the status quo gave rise to hopes that the old world was about to be overturned. Within days, the prestige of political parties, representatives and experts, melted. Many buildings were occupied, and the

State's authority was effectively excluded from these liberated areas. People organized committees to carry out necessary tasks. There was a feverish exchange of views, proposals for collective activity. Discussions went on around the clock — some in an amphitheater where there was a microphone, but mostly between individuals who were discovering the joys that the mass media had deprived them of. There was a widespread conviction that one's daily activity was about to be transformed and that everyone would participate in choosing and bringing about new social arrangements.

Fredy took part in a loosely-organized group of intellectuals, students and young workers who held discussions at the Censier classroom complex and who also tried to communicate their aspirations to auto workers who lived and worked in the Paris suburbs. The Communist Party labor union, the CGT, did not welcome the enthusiastic agitators who came to initiate dialogue with the striking workers for whom it claimed to speak. Union officials feared that they could lose control over "their" strike if the workers insisted on changing the demands from the usual ones concerned with wages to ones which the union could not easily co-opt. Therefore, they kept the factory gates locked and insisted on mediating all contacts with the workers who were occupying the factory. The union bureaucrats finally agreed to transmit an appeal by the "outsiders" to the workers, and one union functionary, using a microphone, gave a distorted account of who the militants were and why they had come to this factory. Since many of the assembled workers were non-French, the outside agitators insisted that the appeal should be presented in Spanish and Serbo-Croatian as

to close them again: their passivity and dependence are negated, annihilated, and nothing but a force which breaks their will can reimpose the passivity and dependence.

The general assembly does not only reject former masters, former authority; it also refuses to create new masters, new authority. The occupants conscious of their power refuse to alienate that power to any force whatever, whether it is externally imposed or created by the general assembly itself. No external force, neither the university administration nor the state, can make decisions for the occupants of the university, and no internally created force can speak, decide, negotiate, or act for the general assembly. There are neither leaders nor representatives. No special group, neither union functionaries, nor a "coordinating committee," nor a "revolutionary party," has the power to negotiate for the university occupants, to speak for them, to sell them out. And there's nothing to negotiate about: the occupants have taken over; they speak for themselves, make their own decisions, and run their own activities. The State and the capitalist press try to set up leaders, spokesmen, representatives with whom to negotiate the evacuation of the university; but none of the "leaders" are accepted: their usurped power is illegitimate; they speak for no one. In the face of this appearance of direct democracy, of grass-roots control (the Capitalist and Communist press call it "anarchy and chaos"), the State has only one resort; physical violence.

Consciousness of collective power is the first step toward the appropriation of social power (but only the first step, as will be shown below. Conscious of their collective power, the university occupants, workers and students, begin to appropriate the power to decide, they begin to learn to run their own social activities. The process of political de-alienation begins; the university is de-institutionalized; the building is transformed into a place which is run by its occupants. There are no "specialists" or "responsibles." The community is collectively responsible for what takes place, and for what doesn't take place, within the occupied building. Formerly

specific information to contribute, that they are able to express ideas, that they can initiate projects. There are no longer specialists or experts; the division between thinkers and doers, between students and workers, breaks down. At this point all are students. When an expert, a professor of law, tells the occupants that the occupation of a university is illegal, a student tells him that it is no longer legal for an expert to define what is illegal, that the days when a legal expert defines what people can and cannot do are over. The professor can either stay and join the process of collective learning, or else he can leave and join the police to re-impose his legality.

Within the occupied university, expression becomes action; the awareness of one's ability to think, to initiate, to decide, is in fact an awareness of one's ability to act. The occupants of the university become conscious of their collective power: "we've decided to make ourselves the masters."[9] The occupants no longer follow orders, they no longer obey, they no longer serve. They express themselves in a general assembly, and the decisions of the assembly are the expression of the will of all its members. No other decisions are valid; no other authority is recognized. "The students and workers who fought on the barricades will not allow any force whatever to stop them from expressing themselves and from acting against the capitalist university, against the society dominated by the bourgeoisie."[10] This awareness of the ability to express oneself, this consciousness of collective power, is itself an act of dealienation: "You can no longer sleep quietly once you've suddenly opened your eyes."[11] People are no longer the playthings of external forces; they're no longer objects; they've suddenly become conscious subjects. And once their eyes are open, people are not about

[9] Leaflet: "Travailleurs de chez Rhône Poulenc," Comité d'Action Ouvriers-Etudiants, Centre Censier, May 14, 1968.

[10] Leaflet: "Appel general à la population," Centre Censier de la Fac des Lettres, May 11, 1968.

[11] Sign on a Censier wall, quoted in *Action*, May 13, 1968, p. 7.

well. The union officials grudgingly agreed, and gave the microphone to Fredy who was delighted to convey the actual appeal.

On another occasion, when a group of Censier activists went to talk to workers at a suburban factory, a number of them were arrested for trespassing. They had climbed over the factory fence, attempting to speak to the workers directly. At the arraignment Fredy explained to the judge that he was an American professor and that he had climbed the fence in order to carry out research about French labor unions. The judge was undoubtedly skeptical, but charges against Fredy were dropped.

Many of the mass demonstrations in Paris ended with the construction of barricades and confrontations with the police. Tear gas was frequently used and demonstrators were chased and beaten by aggressive riot squad police. Though he was never beaten, Fredy fell ill after one demonstration and spent two days in bed, unconscious most of the time.

During these action-filled weeks, there was little time for reading, but Fredy learned about ideas and histories which influenced him in the decade which followed: the texts of the Situationist International, anarchism and the Spanish Revolution, the council communists.

In July 1968, as law and order were being re-imposed on French society, Fredy returned to the United States (…)

(…)

Militants from Europe also visited us in Kalamazoo. One of them, Roger Gregoire, stayed with us for sev-

eral months, working with Fredy on an account and evaluation of experiences the two had shared in May and June 1968 while members of the Citroen Worker-Student Action Committee. The resulting 96-page history and analysis was printed in the spring of 1969. Roger also participated in and observed local actions; and he furnished printing skills for some numbers of the Black & Red periodical which had been launched in September 1968.

(…)

Printing equipment was not available to us in Kalamazoo, but we did find a printer willing to make negatives of the typewritten copy which had been prepared on a portable Hermes machine and laid out using a makeshift light-box. When we had everything ready to print, we went to Ann Arbor to use the facilities of the Radical Education Project (REP), an SDS printing collective.

After they had showed us how to use the equipment, the REP staff treated us as equals and gave us free access to the space. We paid them for the materials we used, helped them with collating or with other menial tasks and left things clean when finished. REP's openness greatly impressed Fredy, all the more since it was clear to everyone that the texts we were printing did not at all conform to the political perspective of the Ann Arbor Collective. (…)

Having Little, Being Much pp. 46–50

Fredy Perlman & Roger Gregoire were subsequently to fall out with one another:

In 1969 Roger Gregoire and Linda Lanphear had gone to Paris intending to continue collaborating on Black

* * *

"On Saturday, May 11, at 6 in the evening, militants of the May 3 Action Committees occupy the annex to the Faculty of Letters, the Censier Center. All night long and on the days that follow, the atmosphere is similar to that of the "night of the barricades," not in terms of violence, but in terms of the self-organization, the initiative, the discussion."[6] The university ceases to be a place for the "transmission of a cultural heritage," a place for training managers, experts and trainers, a place for brainwashing brainwashers.

The capitalist university comes to an end. The ex-university, or rather the building, becomes a place for collective expression. The first step of this transformation is the physical occupation of the building. The second step is discussion, the expression of ideas, information, projects, the creative self-expression of the occupants. "In the large auditoriums the discussion is continuous. Students participate, and also professors, assistants, people from the neighborhood, high schoolers, young workers."[7] Expression is contagious. People who have never expressed ideas before, who have never spoken in front of professors and students, become confident in their ability. It is the example of others speaking, analyzing, expressing ideas, suggesting projects, which gives people confidence in their own ability. "The food service," for example, "is represented at the meetings by a young comrade: he's thirteen, maybe fourteen. He organizes, discusses, takes part in the auditoriums. He was behind the barricades. His action and his behavior are the only answer to the drivel about high-schoolers being irresponsible brats."[8]

What begins at this point is a process of collective learning; the "university," perhaps for the first time, becomes a place for learning. People do not only learn the information, the ideas, the projects of others; they also learn from the example of others that they have

[6] "L'Occupation," *Action*, May 13, 1968, p. 7.
[7] "L'Occupation," *Action*, May 13, 1968, p. 7.
[8] "L'Occupation," *Action*, May 13, 1968, p. 7.

Students have discovered that the division of social tasks among specialized groups is at the root of alienation and exploitation. The alienation of political power by all members of society, and the appropriation of society's political power (through election, inheritance or conquest) by a specialized ruling class, is the basis for the division of society into rulers and ruled. The alienation (sale) of productive labor by producers, and the appropriation (purchase) of the labor and its products by owners of means of production (capitalists), is the basis for the division of society into bosses and workers, managers and employees, exploiters and exploited. The alienation of reflective activity by most members of society and its appropriation by a specialized corps of "intellect workers" is the basis for the division of society into thinkers and doers, students and workers. The alienation of creative activity by most people, and its appropriation by "artists," divides society into actors and audience, creators and spectators. The specialized "professions" and "disciplines" represent the same pattern: a particular economic task or social activity is relegated to a particular individual who does nothing else, and the rest of the community is excluded from thinking about, deciding or participating in the performance of a task which affects the entire community.

By refusing to be formed into a factor or a function in a bureaucratically organized system (even if it is an intelligently organized system), the student is not denying the social necessity of the tasks and functions. He is asserting his will to take part in all the activities that affect him, and he is denying anyone's right to rule him, decide for him, think for him, or act for him. By struggling to destroy the institutions which obstruct his participation in the conscious creation of his social-economic environment, the student presents himself as an example for all men who are ruled, decided for, thought for, and acted for. His exemplary struggle is symbolized by a black flag in one hand and a red flag in the other; it is communicated by a call to all the alienated and the exploited to destroy the system of domination, repression, alienation and exploitation.

& Red projects from there, but they were soon concentrating their attention on the Situationist International (SI), exposing the ideological differences between French leftists and the SI, an organization they were eager to join. Some of Black & Red's earlier activity in Kalamazoo did not conform to the exacting Situationist principles, and certain ideological guardians of the SI viewed askance the openness of the current printing project in Detroit. According to the ideologues, the most essential political task was to clarify differences between Situationist theory and the perspectives of other leftists. Past association with non Situationist activists would have to be repudiated before Linda and Roger could be considered worthy of admission to the SI's inner circle. If past errors were acknowledged and if the confessions conformed to the SI's requirements, the gatekeepers held out hope that Roger and Linda could become participants in the "international revolutionary movement," namely, become members of the SI.

Roger's and Linda's repudiation of past errors took the form of long letters addressed to Fredy but submitted to SI officials as proof of their current convictions. In the letters they reproached Fredy for associating with people in Kalamazoo who lacked even the slightest knowledge of the Situationist critique; the letters pointed out that by printing Radical America in Detroit he was continuing his incorrect practice. They urged him to recognize the flaws of Kalamazoo associates, to break off relations with Radical America as well as with all Detroiters who had conventional leftist views and to make the break public by composing,

printing and distributing an open letter in which his repudiation would be unambiguously stated.

Fredy was deeply hurt by the letters and disappointed in his friends. He was hurt because the Kalamazoo collaboration had been so congenial; Fredy considered the printing projects and the university interventions to have been exemplary acts. The letters distorted what Fredy considered the reality of their shared activity. He was disappointed in his friends' willingness to humiliate themselves; it was their past they were denouncing as well as his. He had expected them to carry out autonomous projects in Paris, similar to ones they had creatively defined in Kalamazoo. Their letters made him question if the past activity of these individuals had really been so admirable if they could now be accepting purges and advocating ideological purity.

Outrage was another of Fredy's responses to the letters and the one that permeated his reply which began:

> Dear Aparatchiki,
> Your recent letters would have meant much more if a carbon of one and the original of the other had not been sent to a functionary of the Situationist International as part of an application for membership. The logic of your arguments would be impressive if it had not been designed to demonstrate your orthodoxy in Situationist doctrine. The sincerity of your "rupture with Fredy Perlman and Black and Red" would be refreshing if it had not been calculated to please a Priest of a Church which demands dehumanizing confessions as a condition for adherence. You're a toady.

Exemplary Character of the University Occupation

To understand why university students in an industrially developed society are "enraged," it is essential to understand that the students are not enraged about the courses, the professors, the tests, but about the fact that the "education" prepares them for a certain type of social activity: it is this activity they reject. "We refuse to be scholars cut off from social reality. We refuse to be used for the profit of directors. We want to do away with the separation between the work of executing and the work of thinking and organizing."[3] By rejecting the roles for which the education forms them, the students reject the society in which these roles are to be performed. "We reject this society of repression" in which "explicitly or implicitly, the University is universal only for the organization of repression."[4] From this perspective, a teacher is an apologist for the existing order, and a trainer of servants for the capitalist system; an engineer or technician is a servant who is super-trained to perform highly specialized tasks for his master; a manager is an agent of exploitation whose institutional position gives him the power to think and decide for others. "In the present system, some work and others study. And we've got a division of social labor, even an intelligent one. But we can imagine a different system…"[5] This division and sub-division of social labor, perhaps necessary at an earlier stage of economic development, is no longer accepted. And if growing specialization is associated with the birth and "progress" of capitalist society (as was argued, for example, by Adam Smith), then the rejection of specialization by future specialists marks the death of capitalist society.

[3] "Votre lutte est la notre," *Action*, May 21, 1968, p. 5.

[4] "Les enfants de Marx et du 13 Mai," *Action*, May 21, 1968, p. 1.

[5] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in interview with Jean-Paul Sartre, "L'imagination au pouvoir," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 20, 1968, p. 5.

slogan "anything is possible" proceeds on the basis of the *potential*, not the usual.

The task of these revolutionaries is not to define the conditions which make revolution impossible, but to create the conditions which make revolution possible. This orientation is probably the most radical break of March 22 and Censier with the traditional Western Left, which begins by pointing to the "objective conditions" (for example, the apathy, self-interest and dependence of workers) which make revolution impossible. The French movement begins by pushing beyond the "objective limits," an orientation which it shares with a handful of Cuban revolutionaries and Vietnamese revolutionaries who began struggling at a time when any analysis of "objective conditions" would have led to a prediction of certain defeat. The French revolutionaries broke out of the psychology of defeat, the outlook of the loser, and began struggling. Their struggle, like that of the Cubans and the Vietnamese, was exemplary: the example overflowed to sectors of the population who are far stronger and more numerous than the initial revolutionaries.

In the spirit of March 22 and Censier, this essay will not deal with the "objective conditions" of French society, but with the exemplary actions which ruptured those conditions; it will not deal with the apathy, self-interest and dependence which make the self-organization of workers and students impossible, but with the role of Censier in creating the radical break which made their self-organization possible; it will not deal with the conditions which prevent communication and cooperation among workers and students, but with the role of Censier in making such communication and cooperation possible. The essay will not try to explain why the Censier movement did not get further, but why it got as far as it did.

Struggle). The English translation of the central parts of this book was published in *CAW*: No. 3, Fall, 1968.

> The odor is made more unpleasant by the fact that you chose to approach the Situationist International precisely in its period of great purges (Khayati, Chasse, Elwell, Vaneigem, Etc.). Some people joined the Communist Party precisely at the time of Stalin's great purges.

In a later paragraph Fredy turns one of their complaints against him into an attack on the S.I.:

> [I]n your letters you refer to my avoidance of the problem of Organization. You're wrong. I avoid being sucked into organizations of professional specialists in "revolution"; apparently you desire to be sucked in. We disagreed about this in Kalamazoo as well, but with this difference: you did not at that time demand unanimity as a basis for working together. To avoid being sucked into such organizations is not the same as to avoid the problem of being sucked in. Unfortunately, seen through the 3-D glasses you're wearing today I'm again missing the point. I'm talking about all other bureaucratic organizations, not about the Situationist International. Its bureaucrats aren't bureaucrats. Its purges aren't purges. Its ideology is not ideology: it is practice; whose practice? the anti-bureaucratic practice of the proletarians; this is the practice that justifies the intimidations, insults, confessions, purges which are necessary to keep the Coherence coherent. This Organization is unique: unlike all the Stalinist Par-

> ties, unlike the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, the Situationist International is itself the world revolutionary movement, so that one does not apply to Verlaan for membership but for "an autonomous positive existence within the international revolutionary movement" (your letter to Verlaan).
>
> The break with Linda and Roger made Fredy even more skeptical that a shared ideological perspective was in itself an adequate basis for undertaking common projects, and it made him decidedly unreceptive to alignments with adherents of Situationism. (…)
>
> *Having Little, Being Much* pp 73–75

Introduction

Who are we? Neither officers nor functionaries of the Worker-Student Action Committees; neither presidents nor secretaries of the movement; neither spokesmen nor representatives of the revolutionaries.

We're two militants who met at the barricades and in Censier; who shared a project with each other as with thousands of other militants active in Paris in May and June 1968.

Why are we writing this account of the May-June events? Not in order to describe a spectacle, nor a history which is to "enlighten" future generations. Our goal is to make transparent, to ourselves and to those who are engaged in the same project, our shortcomings, our lack of foresight, our lack of action. Our aim is to clarify the extent to which our concrete actions furthered the revolutionary project.

The purpose of the critique is to permit us to move further in the realization of the revolutionary project, to act more effectively

dent movement were "exemplary actions"; they set off a process of continuous escalation, each step involving a larger sector of the population.

One of the steps in this process of escalation was the occupation of Censier, annex of the University of Paris Faculty of Letters (Sorbonne). Not as publicised as the actions or personalities of the Nanterre student movement, the activity which developed at Censier during the last two weeks in May parallels and supplements that of the March 22 Movement. This essay will try to describe the steps in the process of escalation as they were experienced and interpreted by the occupants of Censier.

What happened in Censier cannot be explained in terms of French everyday life. The occupants of Censier suddenly cease to be unconscious, passive *objects* shaped by particular combinations of social forces; they become conscious, active *subjects* who begin to shape their own social activity.

The occupants of Censier aim at the destruction of capitalist social relations, but they do not define themselves as the historical subject who will overthrow capitalism. Their actions, like those of the March 22 Movement, are exemplary actions. Their task is to communicate the example to a larger subject: the workers. To make the example overflow from the university to the working population, the Censier occupants create a new social form: worker-student action committees.

Each action is designed to go beyond itself. The aim of the occupants of Censier is not to create a self-governing commune in that building, but to set off the occupation of factories. The occupation of Censier is a break with continuity; the occupants' aim is to create other breaks.

The occupants do not proceed on the basis of what is "normal," but on the basis of what is *possible*. Radical breaks with everyday life are not normal, but they are possible. A movement with the

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qu'un debut, continuons le combat (This Is Only the Beginning, Let's Continue the

being disrupted by a "handful of madmen and adventurers." According to some "revolutionary" grouplets, the movement in France is either an example of the efficacy of "revolutionary vanguards" and "leaders," or else it is an example of the lack of vanguards and leaders. There is also an eclectic version: the "rise" of the movement illustrates the efficacy of the revolutionary vanguards, and its "decline" illustrates what happens to a movement which has no vanguard.[1]

These "explanations" do not explain why anything happened in France in May, 1968. Student revolts and factory occupations are not among the "characteristics" of French society, nor did "peculiar" conditions for such behavior appear in France precisely in May, 1968. The "normal" behavior of students and workers in capitalist society, the desire of students for more privileges and of workers for more goods, does not explain why students and workers ceased acting "normally" and started struggling to destroy the system of privilege.

The explosion of May-June 1968 is a sudden break with the regularities of French society, and it cannot be explained in terms of those regularities. The social conditions, the consciousness of students and workers, the strategies of "revolutionary" sects, had all existed before May, 1968, and had not given rise to a student revolt, a general strike, or a mass movement determined to destroy capitalism. Something new appeared in May, an element which was not regular but unique, an element which transformed the "normal" consciousness of students and workers, an element which represented a radical break with what was known before May, 1968.

The new element, the spark which set off the explosion, was "a handful of madmen" who did not consider themselves either a revolutionary party or a vanguard. The story of the student movement which began in Nanterre with a demonstration to end the war in Vietnam has been told elsewhere.[2] The actions of this stu-

[2] Notably by the "madmen" themselves in: Mouvement du 22 Mars, *Ce n'est*

in a situation similar to the one we experienced. Our intention is not to "clarify" the sequence of events which took place in France in order to make possible a ritual repetition of these events, but rather to contrast the limited views we had of the events at the time we were engaged in them, with views we have gained from further action in different contexts. Thus this account and critique of French events is at the same time a critique of shortcomings we found in ourselves and in those alongside whom we struggled afterwards.

This booklet is divided into two parts. The first part consists of articles which are attempts to understand the events as they took place and to define the perspectives behind the actions. The "perspectives behind the actions" are not private philosophies which we attributed to an external "social movement"; they are not the subjective goals of two militants. They are not projections which "detached historians" impose on events from the outside. The perspectives are the basis on which we participated in the revolutionary project. We do not regard ourselves as "external observers" reporting the activities of others. We were ourselves integral parts of the events we described, and our perspectives transformed the events in which we participated. A militant who rejects the constraints of capitalist daily life was drawn to the university occupations, the street fights, the strike, precisely because the collective project, the project of the others, was also his project. At the same time his perspectives, his project, became part of the collective project. Consequently, when he developed his perspectives, the entire group's project was developed, modified, transformed, since the collective project only exists in the individuals who engage themselves in it and thus transform it. The project is not something which exists in our heads and which we attribute to "the movement," nor is it something which exists in the "collective mind of the movement." Specific individuals engaged themselves in a revolutionary project, and other individuals accepted this project as their own and engaged themselves in it; the project became a collec-

tive project only when numerous individuals chose it and engaged themselves in it. As the number of people grew larger, individuals with different kinds of experiences defined new activities and new perspectives, and consequently contributed new possibilities to all the others engaged in the project; they opened up new potential directions for the entire "movement." Consequently the perspectives of an active participant in the movement were in no way external to the movement.

The second part of this booklet is a critical evaluation of our actions and perspectives; it is an attempt to answer why our actions did not lead to the realization of our perspectives. The point of the critique is to enable us to go further, not to repeat what happened in May-June. What was the nature of the project we engaged in? Why did the escalation of the movement reach a certain point and go no further? When we engaged ourselves in the project initiated by the March 22 Movement in Nanterre, did we engage ourselves in the same manner? If not, what was the difference?

Attempts to realize the revolutionary project after the May-June events made us aware that our engagement in the project of the March 22 Movement had been passive. The initial aim of the Nanterre militants was to change reality, to eliminate social obstacles to the free development of creative activity, and the militants proceeded by eliminating concrete obstacles. However, a large number of people who became the "movement" engaged themselves in a different manner. They did not regard themselves as those who had to move against the concrete obstacles. In this sense they were passive. They "joined a movement," they became part of a mysterious collectivity which, they thought, had a dynamic of its own. By joining the "movement," their only engagement was to move with it. As a result, concrete people, who are the only ones who can transform social reality, were not going to change reality through their own concrete activity; they were going to follow a mysterious force — "the mass," "the movement" — which was going to transform reality. Thus we became dependent on an inexistent power.

Liberated Censier: A Revolutionary Base

PARIS, July, 1968

KALAMAZOO (Michigan), August, 1968

Introduction

The revolutionary movement which showed its head in France in May and June, 1968, has been maligned and misunderstood by the capitalist press, the Communist Party press, and the presses of "revolutionary" grouplets.

According to the liberal capitalist press, the student revolt and general strike can be understood in terms of the "peculiar characteristics" of Gaullist France. According to the Communist Party press, the university occupations and the general strike represent a reform movement, with students fighting for a "modern university" and workers for the satisfaction of material demands, both groups

[1] According to one version, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (J.C.R.) played the "central leadership role" (*The Militant*, July 5, 1968). According to another, students played the leadership role (*The Militant*, June 21, 1968). According to a third version, "the action committees played a vanguard role of central importance" (*The Militant*, June 28, 1968). Yet according to slightly different "vanguard revolutionaries" the movement "failed" because it had no vanguard; they conclude in a headline: "Vital Link of Revolutionary Party Still Needed" and they point out in the article that "the general strike has confirmed the perspective that this paper has put forward over recent years" (*Socialist Worker* — London — July, 1968). The same conclusion was drawn in the *Guardian*, June 1, 1968.

For the Citroën workers, the Citroën Action Committee is an organ for liaison and information. Within the context of the committee, the workers are able to coordinate their efforts to organize rank-and-file committees in the factory's workshops. At the weekly meetings with another action committee, the Inter-Enterprise Committee, Citroën workers learn that similar organizational efforts are taking place in other enterprises, and through their contacts abroad they learn about the efforts of automobile workers in other countries. The workers are aware that the revolutionary significance of the rank-and-file committees can only find expression in another period of crisis. The rank-and-file committees are seen as a basis for the massive occupation of the factories, accompanied by an awareness on the part of the workers that they are the only legitimate power inside the plants (namely that no special group can speak or negotiate for the mass of the workers). The massive occupation, accompanied by the workers' consciousness of their power as a class, is the condition for the workers to begin appropriating, namely using, the instruments of production as an overt manifestation of their power. The act of overt appropriation of the means of production by the workers will have to be accompanied by organized armed defense of the factories, since the capitalist class will try to regain the factories with its police and with what remains of its army. At this point, in order to abolish the capitalist system and to avoid being crushed by foreign armies, the workers will have to extend their struggle to the principal centers of the world capitalist system. Only at that point would complete worker control over the material conditions of life be a reality, and at that point the building of a society without commodities, without exchange and without classes could begin.

by Members of the Citroën Action Committee

(Roger Gregoire and Fredy Perlman)

R. Gregoire
F. Perlman

Kalamazoo February, 1969.

Part I

union's material demands, nothing had been received by the workers:

> …While the CGT union considers itself satisfied with its agreement with the managers, a large majority of the workers, aware that the crumbs received do not correspond to their five weeks of struggle nor to the strike which began as a general strike, are ready to continue this struggle …

On Monday morning, three different leaflets opposed to the return to work were distributed. The CGT officials were not able to find workers willing to distribute their leaflets. The union's forces had passed to the opposition; union delegates and officials were booed during the meeting before the vote. Workers expressed themselves physically to allow speeches by workers opposed to the return to work. During the meeting, a union representative who could not speak because of the booing, demanded to be heard in the name of democracy, and then denounced the workers who booed him as "those who want to wave the red flag of the working class higher than the CGT."

Perspectives

Dissatisfaction with respect to the material demands, and disillusionment with the union, caused the workers to analyze in depth a problem which had been touched earlier by the Citroën Committee, namely the problem of whether militant action should take place inside the union or outside it. A large number of unorganized workers were trying to concentrate their force by forging new forms of organization. Once the problem of the union was solved, the Citroën Committee would be able to develop and enlarge the perspectives for action which could be drawn from its experience.

launching of such an organizational project inside Citroën, since this was one of the last factories still on strike, and since the strike had become a traditional union strike.

The Rhone Poulenc workers, who called on comrades in other plants to follow their example, also pointed out that real workers' power could not be realized unless rank-and-file organization was extended to other parts of the capitalist world. And during the time when the Citroën workers were learning of the experiences of the chemicals workers, some members of the Citroën Committee went to Turin to establish contacts with the Worker-Student League grouped around Fiat, the largest enterprise in Europe. In Turin, information was exchanged on the struggles of the workers in Italy, on the similarity of the obstacles posed by the unions in both countries, and on the significance of the action committees. The organization of rank-and-file committees and the problem of worker control opened up perspectives for the comrades in Turin. As a basis for further contacts, the two groups established a regular exchange of information (leaflets, journals and letters), exchanges of lists of demands, and direct contacts by workers and students. Italian comrades arrived in Paris from Milan in order to establish similar contacts with the Citroën Committee, and some members of the Citroën Committee itself returned to other countries (such as England and the United States) in order to generalize the international contacts.

The Strike for Material Demands

On Saturday, June 22, after the CGT reached an agreement with the Citroën management, workers in the Citroën Committee who opposed the return to work sought contact with other organized forces in order to prepare an action for the following Monday. The workers prepared a leaflet which explained that, in terms of the

The Second French Revolution

PARIS, May 18, 1968.

The major factories of France have been occupied by their workers. The universities are occupied by students who are attending continuing assemblies and organizing Committees of Action. The transportation and communications services are paralyzed.

"After a week of continuous fighting, the students of Paris took possession of the Sorbonne," explains a leaflet of a Students and Workers Committee for Action; "We have decided to make ourselves the masters."

Large student movements have developed in recent years in Japan, the United States, Italy, West Germany and elsewhere. However, in France the student movement quickly grew into a mass movement which seeks to overthrow the socio-economic structure of state-capitalist society.

The French student movement was transformed into a mass movement during a period of ten days. On May 2 the University of Nanterre was closed to students by its dean; the following day the Sorbonne was closed and police attacked student demonstrators. On the days that followed, students learned to protect themselves from the police by constructing barricades, hurling cobblestones, and smearing their faces with lemon juice to repel police gas. By Monday, May 13, 800,000 people demonstrated in Paris and a general strike was called throughout France; a week later the entire French economy was paralyzed.

The first barricade to resist a police charge was built on May 6. Students used newspaper stands and automobiles to build the

barricades, and dug up cobblestones which they threw in exchange for police grenades and gas bombs.

The following day the Latin Quarter of Paris was in a state of siege; fighting continued; a large demonstration at the right-wing newspaper "Le Figaro" protested the newspaper's attempts to mobilize violence against the students. Red flags appeared at the front lines of immense demonstrations, "The International" was sung, and demonstrators cried "Long Live the (Paris) Commune."

On May 10, student demonstrators demand an immediate opening of all universities, and the immediate withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter. Thousands of students, joined by young workers, occupy the main streets of the Latin Quarter and construct over 60 barricades. On the night of Friday, May 10, city police reinforced by special forces charge on the demonstrators. A large number of demonstrators, as well as policemen, are seriously inured.

Up to this point, French newspapers, including the Communist Party organ *L'Humanite*, had characterized the student movement as "tiny groups" and "adventurist extremists." However, after the police repression of May 10, the communist-led union calls for a general strike protesting the brutality of the police and supporting the students. When almost a million people demonstrate in the streets of Paris on May 13, students cry victoriously "We are the tiny groups !"

The very next day, Tuesday May 14, the movement begins to flow beyond the university and into the factories. The aircraft plant Sud-Aviation, manufacturer of the Caravelle, is occupied by its own workers.

On Wednesday, May 15, students and workers take over the Odeon, the French national theater, plant revolutionary red and black flags on the dome, and proclaim the end of a culture limited to the economic elite of the country. The same day numerous plants throughout France are occupied by their workers, including the automobile producer Renault.

were informed of the different forms used by the employers to break the strike by using foreign workers as strike-breakers. Numerous foreign workers were put in contact with strikers, and they took an active part in the occupation of the factory.

The aim of all these actions was to enable, and encourage, rank-and-file organization among the workers.

A small number of workers, isolated in the factory, posed the problem of defending the factory against all forms of aggression. The union had given the order to abandon the factory "in a dignified manner" in case anyone attacked; this order was explained in terms of the "relation of forces." The Citroën Action Committee placed numerous "pickets" outside the factory, and on one occasion the "pickets" defended the factory from an attack by strikebreakers and toughs hired by the owners to chase out the occupying strikers.

The Rank and File Committees

An increasing number of workers went to the Censier Center to seek contacts with the action committees, and the workers transformed the character of the Citroën Committee and they opened perspectives for organization and action by the workers themselves inside the factory. Meetings between the Citroën Committee with the Inter-Enterprise Committee and with workers from the Rhône Poulenc chemical plant opened further perspectives.

Rhône Poulenc workers familiarized the workers of other enterprises with the organization of rank-and-file committees which had taken place very successfully inside their factory. The echo was immediate. Citroën workers recognized that the rank-and-file organizations, where the decision-making power over the running of the strike remained with the workers themselves, was the solution to the problems they had faced during the strike. However the period in which the Citroën workers became familiar with the Rhone Poulenc rank-and-file committees no longer permitted the

eign workers were manipulable because they were generally unpoliticized, uninformed; on several occasions the management had called them together to vote to return to work.

The Foreign Workers' Dormitories

The dormitories for foreign workers enable the owners to exploit the workers twice, namely during the day and again at night. The living quarters are managed by Citroën agents who do not let anyone enter, even members of the workers' families. For example, at the dormitory at Viliers-le-Bel, thirty miles out of Paris, the workers live in forty-eight apartments with fourteen people in each two-or-three-room apartment. The assignment of workers to apartments is done arbitrarily. Thus Yugoslavs are housed together with Spanish and Portuguese workers. The workers are rarely able to communicate with each other. They work in different shifts and in different workshops. The workers pay 150 NF ($30) per month. From this single dormitory, the factory clears 50,000 NF ($10,000) per month.

Members of the Citroën Committee who spoke the languages of the workers established contacts at the dormitories in order to inform the foreign workers about the action committees, and to establish connections between the strikers and foreign workers. The aim of the committee was to enable the workers to organize themselves into action committees in order to cope with their specific problems: transport to the factories, food, the struggle against the repressive conditions inside the factory, and contacts with French comrades. French language courses were organized in several centers after the workers organized themselves into committees and found classrooms in nearby student-occupied universities or in local culture centers. In the slum and ghetto areas, food supplied by peasants and distributed by action committees was taken to poor workers and their families. On all occasions, the foreign workers

Two days after the take-over of the Renault plant, Sorbonne students organize a 6-mile march to demonstrate the solidarity of the students with the workers. At the head of the march is a red flag, and on their way to the plant marchers sing the "International" and call "Down with the Police State," "Down with Capitalism," and "This is only the beginning; continue the struggle !"

A red flag is flown at the entrance to the Renault plant, and individual workers standing on the roof of the building cheer the marching students. However, the C.G.T., the communist union which had taken charge of the strike inside the plant, is guardedly hostile to the student demonstrators, and party spokesmen are openly hostile toward students who call on workers to govern and speak for themselves directly, instead of letting the union govern and speak for them.

While radio stations continue to broadcast that students are exclusively concerned with final examinations and workers are exclusively concerned with improved salaries, students organize Committees of Action, and factory occupations continue to spread.

In the auditoriums and lecture halls of University of Paris buildings, a vast experiment in direct democracy is under way. The state, the ministries, the faculty bodies and the former student representative bodies are no longer recognized as legitimate lawmakers. The laws are made by the constituents of "General Assemblies." Action committees establish contacts with striking workers, and leaflets inform workers of the experience in direct democracy which the students are gaining.

At this writing, the workers continue to be represented and controlled by the unions, and the unions continue to demand reforms from the state and from the factory owners. However, the students' refusal to recognize the legitimacy of any external control, their refusal to be represented by any body smaller than the general assembly, is continually transmitted to the striking workers by the Students and Workers Action Committees.

sectors, and the young workers felt isolated and looked for outside support.

In order to respond to this need for rank-and-file organization, the Citroën Committee proposed a series of actions. Peasants were sending food from the countryside to Sorbonne and Censier; contacts had been established between peasants, action committees and workers. The Citroën Committee informed the workers about the possibilities to obtain food and to contact the peasants directly. The problem was to find means of transport, namely at least one Citroën truck which would transport workers and students to the countryside. This suggestion was favorably received by the workers, and its organizational potential was profoundly grasped. But the workers did not want to take on themselves the responsibility of taking a truck which belonged to the owners, and so they looked for union support. The union representatives sent the workers to the union's central committee at Balard. The central committee was willing to contact the peasants, but only on condition that the whole action was centralized, that it was all directed by the union's central committee; these conditions would have sabotaged all attempts at rank-and-file organization.

The second form of action proposed by the Citroën Committee was to establish contacts among the workers of different enterprises. However, such contacts could not take place inside the factory since the factory had become an impregnable bastion guarded by the union bureaucracy, which opposed any rank-and-file contacts among the workers. Thus the problem was to fight for free expression and for the possibility of worker exchanges.

The third form of action proposed by the action committee was to contact the foreign workers at their dormitories. There were two aspects to these contacts: they were a means to radicalize the struggle by including foreign comrades in the strike pickets, and the contacts were a means to do away with the exhausting struggle of the strikers against strike-breakers, who were generally foreign workers manipulated by the management of the factory; the for-

liaison between the politicized workers at the different Citroën factories.

Contacts At The Factory

At the Balard and Nanterre factories, daily meetings took place between the workers and the action committee. The subject of the meetings was a basic political discussion on the nature of the student movement and its relation to the strike. The factory workers became increasingly conscious that the strike had become transformed more and more into a traditional union strike. They deplored the demobilization and the depolitization of the pickets, which had been accompanied by a massive desertion. At the Balard factory, at night, for example, a small number of young people defended the factory. All the young workers' attempts to organize were sabotaged by the union bureaucracy, either in the form of direct opposition or in the form of seeming to forget problems.

The nonunionized young workers attempted to break out of their isolation. They contacted militants of the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labor) who seemed to favor student-worker contacts, but the CFDT's intentions were political rather than revolutionary; the minority union tried to enlist new members, and the popularity of the student movement among the workers made it opportune for the minority union to associate with the student movement. Secondly, the young workers sought contacts with militants who wanted to work within the union by organizing the rank and file against the officials. Thirdly, the young workers contacted the Citroën Action Committee at Censier, and after the last week in May they worked increasingly with the action committee. At the end of May, the young workers no longer felt either sure of themselves or supported by their comrades within the factory. Police forces had taken repressive steps against strikers in other

Workers Occupy Their Factories

PARIS, May 20, 1968.

The work-force which has taken power in France's main industries was characterized, in the past, by unbridgeable conflicts of interest. The conflicting interests were exploited by factory owners, by the police, and by the state. With the occupation of the factories the differences have diminished, but they have not disappeared, and the differences continue to be exploited, in modified form, within the occupied factories.

In large factories like Citroën, the main conflict was between French workers and foreign workers. This article will limit itself to the forms of exploitation, past and present, of the conflict of interests between these two groups.

Foreign workers, mainly from Portugal, Spain, Yugoslavia and North Africa, worked for wages which were, on the average, less than half the size of French workers' wages. The foreign workers had no choice. First of all the foreigners do not know French, and could not inform themselves either of their human rights or of legal forms. The union did not establish schools for them. Secondly, numerous police bureaucracies made it nearly impossible for foreigners to find jobs once in Paris, and sent them back to their own countries after they had spent the money they had somehow saved in their own countries to come to Paris. In other words, the foreign worker is virtually forced to give up his humanity in order to find a job. Consequently, the foreign worker is not willing to risk losing his job even if his very definition of himself as a human being is in question, since he has largely ceased to define himself as a human

being. Systematically dehumanized, these workers were easily manipulated by the owners of France's big industries: willing to work for low wages, they lowered the overall wage scale; willing to work under any conditions, they were used to break strikes.

From the point of view of the French workers, the foreigners represented a constant threat. An unemployed French worker had to compete with foreigners willing to work for lower wages in worse conditions. Employed workers, privileged in terms of type of job, working conditions and wages, could strike only hesitantly from fear that the factory owners and the state would use the strike as a pretext to replace French by foreign workers.

In order to justify their relative privileges and to rationalize their fear of the foreign workers, French workers developed psychological outlooks which are nearly identical with racism.

The Communist Party union (the C.G.T.) did not make special efforts to equalize the conditions of the foreigners with those of the French workers. This is largely because the work contracts of most of the foreigners were temporary, and the foreign workers could not vote, which means that the foreign workers did not represent a power base for the Communist Party. And some union spokesmen contributed to a further worsening of the foreign workers' situation by collaborating with the police repression of the foreigners, and even by publicly defining foreigners as the greatest threat to the French working class.

In order to understand the present clash of the Communist union with the movement for direct democracy, it must be noted that a "union" is not the unified community of workers of a factory or a region, and it does not express the will of all the workers. The "union" is in fact a particular group of people who "represent" the workers, who speak *for* the workers, who make decisions *for* the workers. This means that a movement of revolutionary democracy which seeks new political forms for the expression of the will of all the workers (for example, through a general assembly of all the workers), threatens the very existence of the present day "union."

> You, THE WORKERS, control your factories. Don't let anyone take the control away from you.
>
> If some people limit your contacts with the outside, if some people do not allow you to learn about the profound democratization taking place in France, then these people are not trying to represent you, but to control you.
>
> The occupied factories have to be opened up to all comrades, workers as well as students, in order to enable them to make decisions together.
>
> Workers and students have the same objectives. Despite the government, the universities are already open to all.
>
> *If the loudspeakers decide instead of you*, if the loudspeakers broadcast the decisions 'we' have made, then the men behind the loudspeakers are not working with you; they're manipulating you.

A second leaflet, prepared by several action committees, was also distributed. This leaflet called for the formation of general assemblies of all the workers which would bypass the union and prevent any small group from speaking in the name of the workers and from negotiating in the name of the working class:

> … The political and union officials were not the originators of the strike. The decisions were made, and must continue to be made, by the strikers themselves, whether they are unionized or not …

In order to circumvent the CGT and to continue its work of liaison and information, the Citroën committee launched three new projects: actions with foreign workers in the slums and the dormitories; contacts with strikers at the entrances of the factories;

encouraged the action committee militants to continue to make personal contact with the foreign workers. The result of two hours of direct communication was that the majority of the foreign workers were inside the factory, actively participating in its occupation.

The Gates Are Shut By The CGT

On May 21, the second day of the occupation, the action committee militants found all the gates of the factory closed, and union delegates defended the entrances against "provocateurs." Thus the young militants were cut off from the contacts they had had before the occupation. Young workers inside the factory protested vigorously against the threats which were hurled at the "elements external to the factory." The CGT had become the new Boss. The union did all it could to prevent workers from becoming aware of the fact that the occupation of the factory was a first step toward the expropriation of the owners. To struggle against this unexpected new force, the action committee addressed itself to the workers in a new leaflet:

> Workers:
>
> You have occupied your factories. You are no longer controlled by the State or by the ex-owners.
>
> Do not allow new masters to control you.
>
> All of you and each of you has the right to speak.
>
> DON'T LET THE LOUDSPEAKERS SPEAK FOR YOU.
>
> If those behind the loudspeakers propose a motion, all other workers, French and foreign, must have the same right to propose other motions.
>
> You, THE WORKERS, have the power. You have the power to decide what to produce, how much end for whom.

The movement for revolutionary democratization, initiated by students, affirms the principle that the *union* of workers, namely the entire collectivity, is the only body which can speak for, and make decisions for the workers. In this conception the official union (and the French Communist Party) would be reduced to a service organization and a pressure group with no decision-making power. This is the reason the C.G.T. (and the Communist Party as a whole) has consistently maligned, insulted, and tried to put an end to the student movement, and the reason why union functionaries have tried to prevent any form of contact between workers and students. In this struggle with the revolutionary movement, the Communist Party, viewed by American liberals as the epitome of evil, has fought for goals and has employed techniques long familiar to American liberals.

The first workers to be influenced by the student movement for autonomy and direct self-government were workers who had much in common with the students, namely young, educated and highly politicized workers. The factory revolutionaries are neither the old party stalwarts nor the uneducated and superexploited foreign workers, but rather relatively privileged young French workers. It is these young workers who take part in the continuous discussions of direct democracy and the overthrow of capitalism and statism which take place continuously at the University of Paris. And it is these workers who are the first to call for strikes in a factory, and who define the goals of the strike as a substitution of capitalism and statism by a system of direct, socialist, workers' democracy.

Once the revolutionary stirring in the factory begins, the union functionaries behave like American liberals in a period of crisis. The union functionaries place themselves at the "head" of what they call the "reform" movement, and instead of speaking of a radical transformation of the socio-economic system, they speak of negotiating with the factory owners (who have *de facto* been expropriated) for higher wages. And in order to constitute themselves

the only legitimate spokesmen for the workers, union functionaries employ a liberal-type "consensus politics" which consists of a maximal exploitation of the conflicts between the interests among the varied levels of workers in the factory.

Union functionaries frighten older, conservative French workers with a threat of the unimaginably violent repression which "anarchist adventurism" will lead to. This threat is given force by the fact that, during the growth and radicalization of the movement, the Communist Party has increasingly cooperated with the state power (which still holds the force of the army in reserve), and by the fact that the Communist Party has not been France's greatest critic of police repression or even of colonial exploitation. In fact, the policies of the Gaullist regime coincided with the policies of the Communist Party more frequently than not.

And union functionaries try to isolate the revolutionary young workers by making one of their rare appeals for the support of foreign workers. The morning of the factory occupation is one of the rare occasions when a great effort is made to translate union leaflets into all the languages of the foreign workers. And in these leaflets, and through the loudspeakers, the union spokesmen, in characteristically liberal fashion, tell the foreign workers that "our" demands are for higher wages and longer vacations. The use of the first person plural is artificial, since except for the words spoken over the loudspeaker, there is very little contact between the union functionaries and the foreign workers, and the one-way speaker system obviously annihilates the very possibility of a two-way discussion which enables the workers to define what "our" demands actually are.

Although students and revolutionary workers are the dynamic forces behind the occupation of the factories, once all the workers have been convinced to move inside the factory and "occupy" it, union officials close the factory gates on the students standing outside, and they isolate the revolutionary workers on the inside. The union functionaries isolate the young workers from the old

> Through their labor, the foreign workers participate in the creation of the wealth of French society. They must have the same rights as all others.
>
> Thus it is up to revolutionary workers and students to see to it that the foreign workers ENJOY THE TOTALITY OF THEIR POLITICAL AND UNION RIGHTS.
>
> This is the concrete beginning of internationalism.
>
> The foreign workers, who make up an integral part of the working class in France, together with their French comrades, will massively join the radical struggle to destroy capitalism and to create a CLASSLESS SOCIETY such as has NEVER yet been seen.

On May 20, students and workers of the Citroën Committee distributed leaflets and talked to workers at all the entrances to the Citroën factories. The first contacts with delegates of the CGT were negative. The delegates tried to prevent the distribution of the leaflets. The pretext was that the variety of leaflets would destroy the unity of the workers and would create confusion. "It would be better," the delegates said, "if the elements external to the factory went away: they give a provocative pretext to the management."

However, a significant number of the Communist Party and CGT functionaries who had come to give a strong hand to the CGT were external to the factory, namely they did not work in any of the Citroën plants. The CGT officials gave out leaflets which demanded, among other things, a minimum wage of 1,000 NF ($200), namely nearly twice as much as they had sought two days earlier.

In the street, the union delegates communicated with workers through loudspeakers. The students of the Citroën committee, on the other hand, mixed freely with the French and foreign workers. Since the foreign workers were not obeying the CGT calls to occupy the factory, the union officials decided to use the students. Instead of trying to chase away the young "agitators," the officials

ranks of the entire working class. The capitalist regime cannot satisfy these demands.

The second leaflet, printed in four languages, was addressed to foreign workers:

> Hundreds of thousands of foreign workers are imported like any other commodity useful to the capitalists, and the government even organises clandestine immigration from Portugal, thus showing itself as a slave driver.
>
> These workers are ferociously exploited by the capitalists. They live in terrible conditions in the slums which surround Paris. Since they are underqualified, they are underpaid. Since they only speak their own language, they remain isolated from the rest of the working population and are not understood. Thus isolated, they accept the most inhuman work in the worst workshops.
>
> ALL THIS BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO CHOICE:
>
> They left their countries because they were starving, because their countries are also under the yoke of capital. Victims in their own countries, they are victims here too.
>
> All that has to end.
>
> Because they are not ENEMIES OF THE FRENCH PROLETARIAT: ON THE CONTRARY, THEY ARE THE SUREST ALLIES. If they are not moving yet, it is because they are aware of the precariousness of their situation. Since they have no rights, the smallest act can lead to their expulsion, which means a return to hunger (and to jail).

by painting the young workers as extremist adventurists who will bring the police running into the factory, and from the foreign workers by insinuating that only the union is fighting for the improvement of wages of the foreign workers, and if the union fails, then the foreign workers might lose their hard-won jobs and be forced by the police to return to their countries.

Since the originality and courage of the students is admired by most sectors of the French population, the Communist Party vascillates between mild support and extreme attacks. And in order to prevent the revolutionary and experimental political forms developed by the students from flowing into the working class, the Communist Party is cooperating with the state, collaborating with its “class enemy” (the factory owners), and exploiting differences of interest among the workers which were formerly exploited by the capitalist state and the owners.

Thus after the factory is occupied by all its workers, the union becomes the only spokesman for the workers. In other words, while the workers as a whole have decided to take over their own factories and to expropriate the owners, the workers have not yet developed political forms through which to discuss and execute their subsequent decisions. In this vacuum, the union makes the decisions instead of the workers, and broadcasts its decisions to the workers through loudspeakers. And at the present writing, the Communist union had decided for the workers that the expropriated factories were to be returned to their owners in exchange for higher wages.

F. Perlman

Citroën Action Committee — I

PARIS, May 30, 1968[1]

The Action Committees born throughout France at the end of May transcend half a century of left-wing political activity. Drawing their militants from every left-wing sect and party, from social democrats to anarchists, the Action Committees give new life to goals long forgotten by the socialist movement, they give new content to forms of action which existed in Europe during the French Revolution, and they introduce into the socialist movement altogether new forms of local participation and creative social activity.

This article will trace the development, during the last ten days of May, of a committee (the Workers-Students Action Committee — Citroën) whose primary task was to connect the "student movement" with the workers of the Citroën automobile plants in and around Paris.

On Tuesday, May 21, a strike committee representing the workers of the Citroën plants called for a strike of unlimited duration. The factory owners immediately called for "state powers to take the measures which are indispensible for the assurance of the freedom of labor and free access to the factories for those who want to work." (Le Monde, May 23, 1968.)

The same day that the owners called for police intervention, students, young workers and teachers who on previous days had fought the police on the streets of Paris formed the "Citroën Action Committee" at the Censier center of the University of Paris.

[1] An abridged version of this article was published in the *Guardian*, June 29, 1968.

roën the CGT had a very small membership; was the CGT taking the initiative, it was asked, in order to gain control of a movement which up to this point had been out of its control?

The May 20th Strike and the Occupation

Worker-student action committees had been functioning at the Censier Center since May 13. After the first exchange between the Citroën workers and the students, a new committee was formed. The Citroën Action Committee prepared two leaflets for May 20, one addressed to all the workers, the other to the foreign workers at the Citroën factories. The committee's aim was to inform the workers of the student movement which had challenged the capitalist system and all forms of hierarchy. The leaflets did not challenge the union nor the union demands. On the contrary, the leaflets suggested that the union demands challenged the capitalist system the same way the students had challenged it. The leaflets expressed an awareness of the common enemy of the workers and the students, an enemy who could not be destroyed unless the workers controlled the productive forces. The occupation of the factories was seen as the first step towards workers' power.

The first leaflet said:

> Millions of workers are on strike.
>
> They are occupying their workshops. This massive, growing movement goes beyond the established Power's ability to react.
>
> In order to destroy the police system which oppresses all of us, we must fight together.
>
> Workers-Students Action Committees have been constituted for this purpose. These committees bring to light all the demands and all the challenges of the

Citroën Action Committee — II

PARIS, June 24, 1968.[1]

Experience and Perspectives

The Citroën factories employ about 40 thousand workers in Paris and its surroundings. A total of 1500 workers are in unions. Inside the factories, the owners organize repression by means of management agents, a private police and a "free union." About 60 percent of the workers are foreign, and they are employed on the more onerous assembly lines.

On Friday, May 17, work stoppages took place in the workshops of numerous factories. Such an event had not occurred for decades. On that day several workers went to the Censier Center of the University of Paris and described the police repression, the impotence of the union, and the fighting spirit of the workers. The factory workers, they said, were ready to stop work on the coming Monday if pickets were available and if the information were spread through the factories. Together with the Citroën workers, Censier students prepared a leaflet to be distributed the following day at all the Citroën plants.

The following day, Saturday, the CGT (General Confederation of Labor) distributed a leaflet calling for a strike on Monday and demanding a minimum wage of 600 NF (about US $120) a month. Numerous factories all over France were already on strike. At Cit-

[1] Published in *Intercontinental Press* (Vol. 6, No. 27), July 29, 1968, pp. 683–688.

The first aim of the Action Committee was to cooperate with the factory's strike committee in bringing about an occupation of the factory. The Action Committee's long-term goal was to help bring about a revolutionary situation which would lead to the destruction of capitalist society and the creation of new social relations.

Action Committee Citroën is composed of young French and foreign workers and intellectuals who, from the committee's inception, had equal power and equal voice in the formulation of the committees projects and methods. The committee did not begin with, and has not acquired, either a fixed program or a fixed organizational structure. The bond which holds together former militants of radical-left organizations and young people who had never before engaged in political activity, is an uncompromising determination to dismantle the capitalist society against whose police forces they had all fought in the streets.

The committee has no fixed membership; every individual who takes part in a daily meeting or action is a participating member. Anyone who thinks enough people have gathered together to constitute a meeting can preside; there is no permanent president. The order of the discussion is established at the beginning of the meeting; the subjects to be discussed can be proposed by any member. The committee is autonomous in the sense that it does not recognize the legitimacy of any "higher" body or any external "authority." The committee's projects are not realizations of pre-determined plans, but are responses to social situations. Thus a project comes to an end as soon as the situation changes, and a new project is conceived, discussed and put into action in response to a new situation.

On the day when the strike committee of the Citroën factories called on the workers to occupy their factories, the Citroën Action Committee launched its first project: to contribute to the factory occupation by talking to workers and by giving out leaflets explaining the strike. One leaflet was a call to worker-student unity in the struggle "to destroy this police system which oppresses all of

us… Together we'll fight, together we'll win." (Leaflet "Camarades," Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Centre universitaire Censier, 3ème etage.)

Another leaflet was the first public announcement of the committee's uncompromising internationalism. "Hundreds of thousands of foreign workers are imported like any other commodity useful to capitalism, and the government goes so far as to organize clandestine immigration from Portugal, thus unveiling itself as a slave-driver."

The leaflet continues: "All that has to end !… The foreign workers contribute, through their labor, in the creation of the wealth of French society… It is therefore up to revolutionary workers and students to see to it that the foreign workers acquire the totality of their political and union rights. This is the concrete basis for internationalism." ("Travailleurs Etrangers," Comité d'Action, Censier.)

At 6:00 a.m. on the morning of the occupation, when the Citroën workers approached their factories, they were greeted by young workers, students and teachers distributing the orange and green leaflets. On that morning, however, the young Action Committee militants were greeted by two surprises. First of all, they found the functionaries of the C.G.T. (the communist union) calling for the occupation of the factory, and secondly, they were approached by the union functionaries and told to go home.

On previous days, the C.G.T. had opposed the spreading strike wave and the occupation of the factories. Yet on the morning of the occupation, arriving workers who saw the union functionaries reading speeches into their loudspeakers at the factory entrances got the impression that the C.G.T. functionaries were the ones who had initiated the strike.

However, the union, unlike the student movement and unlike the workers who had initiated the strike, was not calling for an expropriation of the factories from their capitalist owners, or for the creation of a new society.

a future event: the same cracks will not be found twice in the same dam; they will have been repaired, and the entire dam will have been raised. A future tidal wave will find new cracks in the dam, cracks which are as invisible to insurgents as to defenders of the old order. This is why conspiratorial organizations which plan to rush through a particular crack in the dam are bound to fail: no matter how ingenious their "central committees," there is no reason to assume that the "directors" or "leaders" of the conspiratorial group will be able to see a crack which the directors of the established order cannot see. Furthermore, the established order is far better armed with tools for investigation than any conspiratorial group.

Historians will describe through which cracks the sea rushed in May 1968. The task of revolutionary theory is to analyze the sea itself; the task of revolutionary action is to create a new tidal wave. If the sea represents the entire working population, and if the tidal wave represents a determination to re-appropriate all the forms of social power which have been alienated to capitalists and bureaucrats at all levels of social life, then new cracks will be found, and if the dam is immaculate it will be swept away in its entirety.

At least one lesson has been learned: what was missing was not a small party which could direct a large mass; what was missing was the consciousness and confidence on the part of the entire working population that they could themselves direct their social activity. If the workers had possessed this consciousness on the day they occupied their factories, they would have proceeded to expropriate their exploiters; in the absence of this consciousness, no party could have ordered the workers to take the factories into their own hands. What was missing was class consciousness in the mass of the working population, not the party discipline of a small group. And class consciousness cannot be created by a closed, secret group but only by a vast, open movement which develops forms of activity which aim openly to subvert the existing social order by eliminating the servant-mentality from the entire working population.

The functionaries of the communist union were calling for higher wages and improved working conditions, within the context of capitalist society. Thus the functionaries strenuously opposed the distribution of the Action Committee's leaflets, on the ground that their distribution would "disrupt the unity of the workers" and would "create confusion."

The union functionaries did not spend too much time arguing with the Action Committee militants because the factory occupation did not take place as they had "planned" it.

Sixty percent of the labor force of the Citroën plants are foreign workers, and the vast majority of them are not in the C.G.T. (nor in the smaller unions). When a small number of union members entered the factory in order to occupy it, they were kept out of the workshops by factory policemen placed inside by the owners. The vast majority of the foreign workers did not accompany the union members into the factory; the foreign workers stood outside and watched. The union officials made a great effort to translate the written speeches into some of the languages of the foreign workers. The foreign workers listened to the loudspeakers with indifference and at times even hostility.

At that point the union officials stopped trying to chase away the Action Committee agitators: in fact, the officials decided to use the agitators. Among the militants there were young people who spoke the languages of the foreign workers, and the young people mingled freely with the foreign workers. On the other hand, the union officials, seasoned bureaucrats, were institutionally unable to speak directly to the workers: years of practice had made them experts at reading speeches into loudspeakers, and their loudspeakers were not leading to the desired effects.

Thus the functionaries began to encourage the young agitators to mix with the workers, to explain the factory occupation to them; the functionaries even gave loudspeakers to some of the foreign members of the Action Committee. The result was that, after about two hours of direct communication between the foreign workers

and the Action Committee members, most of the foreign workers were inside the factory, participating in its occupation.

Proud of their contribution to the occupation of Citroën, the Action Committee people went to the factory the following morning to talk to the occupying workers. Once again they found themselves unwelcome. A large red flag flew outside the factory gate, but the young militants found the gate closed to them. At the entrances to the factories stood union officials who explained they were under strict orders (from the union's — and the C.P.'s — central committee) not to let students or other outsiders inside the factory. The young agitators explained that they had played a crucial role in the factory's occupation, but the expression on the faces of the union functionaries merely hardened.

That evening the Citroën Action Committee had an urgent meeting. The committees members were furious. Until now, they said, they had cooperated with the union; they had avoided an open confrontation. Their cooperative attitude had made no difference to the union officials; the committee militants had merely let themselves be used by the functionaries, and once used up, they were rejected. It was about time to confront the union openly. The committee drafted a new leaflet, one which called on the workers to push past the union and take control of the factory into their own hands.

Due to the presence of union guards at the factory entrances, a relatively small number of workers read the leaflet. However, among these workers there were some who resented the union take-over inside the factory, and some who began attending the meetings of the Citroën Action Committee and participating in the political discussions at Sorbonne and Censier.

At this point the Citroën Committee together with other action committees at Sorbonne and Censier composed a call to action for the workers inside the factories. "The policy of the union leaders is now very clear; unable to oppose the strike, they try to isolate the most militant workers inside the factories, and they let the strike rot so as to be able, later on, to force the workers to accept the agree-

movement caught both sides by surprise. Neither side was prepared. But the moment of hesitation was fatal only to the revolutionaries; the ruling class took advantage of the brief pause to extinguish the fire. The fact that only one side gained from the pause is understandable; the revolutionaries would have had to rush into the unexplored, the unknown, whereas the "forces of order" were able to fall back to well known, in fact classical forms of repression.

The revolutionary movement rushed forward at tremendous speed, reached a certain line, and then, suddenly disoriented, confused, perhaps afraid of the unknown, stopped just long enough to allow the enormous French police forces to push the movement back, disperse it and destroy it. Reflection now begins on both sides. Revolutionaries are beginning to define the line which was reached; they are determined to go beyond it "next time." They had come so close, and yet were pushed back so far ! To many it was clear that steps into the unknown had been taken, that the line had in fact been crossed, that the sea had in fact begun to flow over the dam. To many it was not surprising that the dam should be reinforced, that efforts to stem the tide should be undertaken. What they had not expected, what they only slowly and painfully accepted, was that the sea itself should begin to ebb. They accepted the retreat with pain because they knew, as they watched the waters recede, that as high as the tide had risen, as close as the flood had come, the sea would have to gather much more force, the tide would have to rise far higher, merely to reach the level of the dam once again.

The ruling classes have been warned; one must assume that they will take the necessary precautions. Analysis of the particular cracks in the dam through which the floodwaters rushed will be undertaken by both sides. Such analysis will be a documentation of a particular event, a history of a revolution that failed. On the basis of this documentation, ruling classes will prepare themselves to prevent the recurrence of the same event. This is why revolutionaries cannot use the documentation as a basis for the preparation of

From Student Revolt to General Strike: A Frustrated Revolution

PARIS, June 13, 1968

The explosion which paralyzed France in May 1968 was a frustrated revolution and a clear warning. It represents a frustrated revolution to the students and workers who were rushing, almost blind with joy and enthusiasm, into a new society. But the revolt and the strike are a warning to all ruling classes, a warning to capitalists and bureaucrats, to governments and unions. The frustrated revolutionaries are beginning to take stock of the accomplishments and are attempting to pinpoint the shortcomings. However, the revolutionaries are not the only ones who are taking stock. The forces of repression are also undertaking the task of analysis; they too are taking stock of the accomplishments, or rather the dangers unveiled for them in May 1968. And the revolutionaries will not be the only ones who will prepare for the next crisis; the ruling classes will also prepare, and not only in France. Politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists will define the forms of the May revolution, so as to prevent their reappearance; they will study the sequence of events, so as to prevent a recurrence of May 1968. In order to remain ahead of the forces of reaction, the May revolutionaries will have to provide more than souvenirs; they will have to see the general models behind the specific sequence of events; they will have to analyze the content behind the forms.

The sequence of events which led to a sudden confrontation between French state capitalism and a determined revolutionary

ments which the unions will reach with the owners," the leaflet explains. However, the leaflet continues, "the political parties and the unions were not at the origin of the strike. The decisions were those of the strikers themselves, whether unionized or not. For this reason, the workers have to regain control over their work organizations. All strikers, unionized or not, unite in a Permanent General Assembly ! In this Assembly, the workers themselves will freely determine their action and their goals."

This call for the formation of General Assemblies inside the factories represents an appeal to expropriate the capitalist class, namely an appeal for insurrection. With the formation of a General Assembly as the decision-making body inside the factory, the power of the state, the owner as well as the union ceases to be legitimate. In other words, the General Assembly of all the workers in the factory becomes the only legitimate decision-making power; the state is bypassed, the capitalist is expropriated, and the union ceases to be the spokesman for the workers and becomes simply another pressure group inside the General Assembly.

Unable to communicate these ideas to the workers at the factory, the Citroën Action Committee drafted a new project. Since sixty percent of the factory's workers are foreign, and since the foreign workers live in special housing projects provided for them by the factory owners, the Citroën Committee decided to reach the workers at their homes. The foreign workers were spending their days at their living quarters since they were no longer able to transport themselves to the factories (the transport to the factories is also furnished by the factory owners, and was obviously not being furnished during the strike).

Since this project was conceived during a period when gasoline was scarce in Paris, most of the participants had to hitch-hike to the housing centers. Several related projects were suggested by the Action Committee militants to the foreign workers. First of all the foreign workers were encouraged to help those strikers who were calling for worker-control of the factories, and not merely for wage-

raises. And secondly, the foreign workers were encouraged to organize themselves into action committees in order to cope with their own specific problems.

The Action Committee's project initiated and stimulated various kinds of activities among the foreign workers. In some of the living quarters, courses were organized for foreign workers who know no French. In Nanterre, for example, the occupation committee of the University of Nanterre granted a room to a newly formed Action Committee of Yugoslav workers. The room was to serve for political meetings and French lessons. In another center, workers organized to protect themselves collectively from abuses by the landlord's (namely Citroën's) agent at the housing center. In some of the ghettos around Paris, where poor workers had run out of food for their families, trucks were found to transport food from peasants who contributed it at no cost. Contacts were established between the foreign workers and the revolutionary workers inside the factories. Foreign workers were encouraged to join French workers in the occupation of the factories. On each excursion to the living quarters, the Citroën Action Committee members told the foreign workers not to let themselves be used as strike breakers by the factory owners.

In all of the contacts between the Citroën Action Committee and foreign workers, the Committee's internationalism was made clear. When the committee members called for the expropriation of the owners and the establishment of workers' power inside the factories, they emphasized that the power over the factory would be shared by all laborers who had worked in it, whether French or foreign. And when some foreign workers said they were only in France for a short time and would soon return home, the Action Committee militants answered that the goal of their movement was not to decapitate merely French capitalism, but to decapitate capitalism as such, and thus that, for the militants, the whole world was home.

Roger Gregoire & Fredy Perlman
Worker-Student Action Committees. France May ’68
1969

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equal in terms of their quantity and in terms of their quality. To analyze the French general strike it is necessary to understand both types of inequality, and it is crucial to grasp the difference between them. The quantitative inequality has been thoroughly analyzed by an apologetic and a critical literature. A whole area of knowledge, the “science of economics,” exists to mask this quantitative inequality. According to this “science,” each side of the exchange is paid for its “contribution”: capital is exchanged for a “corresponding” quantity of profits, and labor is exchanged for a “corresponding” quantity of wages. It is to be noted that the quantities which are exchanged do not correspond to each other, but to a historical relation of forces between the capitalist class and the working class, and that strikes and unions have increased the quantity of goods to which labor “corresponds.” However, the purpose of this “theory” is not analytic but apologetic: its point is to mask the fact that more is exchanged for less, that workers produce more goods than they receive in exchange for their labor. Yet this fact is hard to mask: if workers received all the goods they produced, there would be no capital, and there would be nothing left over for State, Army, Police or Propaganda.

Furthermore, the proposition that each is paid for “his” contribution, the capitalist for “his” capital and the worker for his labor, simply isn’t true: the capitalist’s “contribution” consists of means of production produced by workers, so that the capitalist is paid for the worker’s labor. The capitalist absorbs (or accumulates) surplus labor, namely what the worker contributes but doesn’t get, or what’s “left over” after the workers are paid.

Labor unions concern themselves exclusively with the quantitative relation between workers and capitalists. The union’s role is to decrease the degree of exploitation of the workers, namely to increase the goods workers receive in exchange for their labor, and at times even to increase the share of social wealth which is distributed to the working class. Unions help workers *have* more, not *be* more. They serve to increase the quantity of goods the worker re-

ceives in exchange for his alienated labor; they do not serve to abolish alienated labor. Unions, like economists of Communist countries, as well as much 20th Century socialist literature, deal exclusively with the *quantitative* relation between workers and capitalists.

However, wildcat strikers in France last May did not occupy their factories in order to get a larger share of the goods they produced. It was the Union (The General Confederation of Labor) which clamped this goal on the strike, in order to de-rail it. The revolutionary issue last May was the *qualitative* relation between workers and capitalists, not the quantitative relation. Yet the qualitative relation has not been treated extensively by revolutionary socialists — perhaps partly because the quantitative problem can be grasped more easily and can be illustrated with statistics in a society which worships quantities, partly because Soviet theorists dismissed the whole problem as "idealism," and partly because capitalist ideologues have tried to co-opt the issue and to transform it into a quasi-religious liberal reform program. The result is that the action of workers and students was far more radical than the theory of most "revolutionary theorists" and "strategists."

The two terms of the act of exchange — labor and wages, creative power and consumer goods, living energy and inanimate things — differ in quality, in kind. The two terms continue to differ in quality

[17] This statement excludes the likelihood that infinitesimal quantitative changes will gradually lead to a qualitative leap, a prospect offered by J.M. Keynes: with the continued development of society's productive forces, it can become "comparatively easy to make capital-goods so abundant that the marginal efficiency of capital is zero. . (A) little reflection will show what enormous social changes would result from a gradual disappearance of a rate of return on accumulated wealth." One of the main social consequences would be "the euthanasia of the rentier, and, consequently, the euthanasia of the cumulative oppressive power of the capitalist to exploit the scarcity-value of capital," i.e. the disappearance of the capitalist and the disappearance of capitalism. (J.M. Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964, p. 221 and p. 376.)

outside, they are suddenly helpless spectators who expect something to rise out of the "working class"; they cease to define themselves as members of society who have the power to transform it. They suddenly accept the legitimacy of the power of separate groups over the social instruments for their own liberation.

Roger Gregoire
Fredy Perlman

stopping the academic bureaucracy is not enough: they know they have to stop activities in the rest of society. However, their strategy ends where it begins: with the university. Through a disruption of classes, through exposures of professors and occupations of auditoriums, they are able to stop the activities of the capitalist university. They know that their own choices are limited because of the activities of workers; they know that their own liberation means that they take what previous generations built, and they use these instruments to define the content and direction of their lives with other living individuals in collective projects.

They know that the power of the bureaucrats depends on the students' acceptance of this power. They also know that the power of the state, of capitalists and of union bureaucrats depends on workers' acceptance of this power. But the workers' acceptance also has to be explained, since that partly depends on the indifference of the rest of the population. Thus the workers regard it as a normal part of life to sell their labor, to alienate their creative activity, and the rest of the population accepts this.

In the university, students begin to put the separate power of the bureaucrats to an end. But when they go to the factories, they are unable to define the steps which are necessary to break the dependence and helplessness of the workers. This reflects a lack of theory. They go to the workers as if the workers did in fact represent a separate group which must define its own separate strategy of liberation. Furthermore, although the student militants are able to connect their own powerlessness with the sheepishness of the workers who indifferently produce the instruments of their own repression, they make this connection only in concepts and are unable to translate it to reality; they are unable to define a strategy which is related to this perception. In the university they are conscious of themselves as living agents, they are conscious of their own power to transform their daily lives. They are able to set themselves a collective objective, and are able to move towards it. But they are unable to extend this power beyond the university. Once

no matter what happens to their quantities.[17] In other words, the fact that the worker exchanges *labor* for *wages*, namely two different qualities, does not change if the worker gets more wages, more consumer goods, more things in exchange for his creative power. There is no "reciprocity" in this act of "exchange": the worker alienates his living energy in exchange for lifeless objects; the capitalist appropriates the alienated labor of workers in exchange for nothing. (In order to maintain the fiction of reciprocity, "objective social scientists" would have to say the capitalist appropriates the productive power of society in exchange for his domination; they do sometimes say this, in more euphemistic terms.)

By selling his labor, the producer alienates his productive power, his activity; he alienates what he does in life. In exchange for his activity, or to compensate for his lost life, he eats, drinks, travels, surrounds himself with lifeless objects, abandons himself to animated cartoons, and intoxicates himself with vicarious experiences.[18]

American sociologists have tried to reduce the alienation of labor to a *feeling* of alienation: thus reduced, the problem can be "solved" in capitalist society, without revolution; all that's needed is some solid propaganda and a competent corps of sociologists and psychologists who know how to change workers' feelings. However, so long as capitalist relations exist, the worker will continue to *be* alienated even if he *feels* de-alienated. Whether or not the worker is "happy" about it, by alienating his activity he becomes

[18] It has frequently been noted that the alienated labor of capitalist society differs from slavery and serfdom. The slave's entire being, and not merely his labor (or labor-time) is the property of the master; strictly speaking, the slave has nothing to alienate, since he is not a person but an object, a piece of property. The serf, on the other hand, is not owned by his lord, and does not alienate his labor; he is forced to give up the products of his labor, and he receives nothing in exchange (except the "protection" of his lord — which in practice means oppression, domination, and often death). The laborer, unlike the slave, is a "free man": his body is his own; it is his labor which becomes the property of an owner. Unlike the serf, the laborer alienates his labor, but receives something in exchange for what he gives away.

passive, by alienating his creativity he becomes a spectator, by alienating his life he lives through others. Whether or not he is "happy" about it, by alienating his productive power, he gives that power to a class which uses it to hire him, decide for him, control him, manipulate him, brainwash him, repress him, kill him, entertain him and make him "happy."

The quantitative relations between workers and capitalists have a history. The quantity of goods produced per laborer has increased, the quantity of goods received by workers has increased, and even the share of the social product received by workers may have increased within specific regions, although if one views the world economy as a whole this has not taken place. The application of science to technology increases the productivity of labor and thus the productive power which the capitalist class commands; the increased quantity of goods has enlarged the empire controlled by capitalists; competition in the introduction of technological innovations, and also periodic crises, have ruined inefficient or unlucky capitalists, and thus made possible the centralization of enormously enlarged capitals and the integration of technologically related processes. The centralization of capital and the integration of related processes has meant that numerous activities take place under the same roof, and that production becomes a sophisticated process of coordination and cooperation.

However, the qualitative relation between workers and capitalists does not have a history within capitalist society: it is born with capitalism and abolished with capitalism: it is part of the *structural* backbone of capitalism. The worker is the ruled object, the capitalist is the ruling subject; the worker alienates his productive power, the capitalist appropriates it; the worker's labor creates products, the capitalist owns them and sells them to the worker; the worker creates Capital, the capitalist invests it; the worker produces more than he consumes, he creates a surplus; the capitalist disposes of the surplus and thus determines the shape of the worker's environment, forms a repressive apparatus which keeps the worker "in his

that their own practical activities at Nanterre have repercussions on the entire world society.

Even without a background in Marxist theory, students can see themselves manipulated daily by bureaucrats whose personal achievements and quality of life are not overly impressive: professors, university administrators, state functionaries. The students see themselves being used for purposes defined by the bureaucrats; they see themselves being trained to perform activities which others consider necessary. They also perceive, though more vaguely, that the activities for which they're being prepared are related to the spectacle they watch on TV and in the press. These perceptions become "a theory" when the connections between the activities of the students, the professors, the bureaucrats, are made explicit. Revolutionary theory brings to light the connections between the students' own daily activities and the society of obedient TV-watching robots. The "revolutionary" mini-groups obviously contribute to this elucidation of daily life, since each group's "treasure" is one or another of Marx's numerous insights into the links between the daily activities of people under capitalism.

This exposure of the connections between the separate activities of capitalist daily life, this "research through action" which was undertaken by students at Nanterre, was only partially communicated to other sectors of the population, if at all. As soon as students perceived the connection between their passivity in the classroom and the brainwashing that took place in the university, they also perceived the action they had to undertake to put an end to the brainwashing: they had a strategy, and it consisted of breaking down the passivity of students.

When the Nanterre militants began to expose the activities they were being trained to perform, they developed only half a strategy for their own liberation. When they questioned the legitimacy of state and academic bureaucrats to define the content and direction of their lives, they developed only those tactics which would take power away from the academic bureaucrats. They know that

A background in Marxist theory undoubtedly plays a large role in giving European students some tools with which to grasp the connection between their studies and the war. However, in addition to this background in critical theory, through the mass media European students are given a daily view of the grossest spectacle in the modern world: the United States.

Increasingly sophisticated means of communication reveal to spectators all over the world a spectacle of two hundred million people who passively observe "their own boys" killing, torturing, maiming human beings daily, a spectacle of torture which is "scientifically" prepared by teams of the most highly trained "scientists" in the world, a spectacle of an immense "educational system" devoted to a frantic research for methods of controlling, manipulating, maiming and killing human beings.

The arrogant insistence with which the "American way of life" advertises itself puts the European student on guard against the methods through which "Americans" are produced. The Nanterre student is able to see himself being transformed into an indifferent servant of a military machine. Students become aware that the activities for which they are being trained are intimately related to the Vietnam war. They begin to grasp connections between the bureaucratic content of their "education," the activities performed by the bureaucrats, and the killing of Vietnamese. And when students begin to engage in "exposures" of their professors and classes, they try to make explicit, transparent, the connection between the "objectivity" of this or that "social science," and the activity which is a consequence of the practice of this "objective knowledge"; they begin to unveil what this system of knowledge does.

Students who begin to struggle against the war in Vietnam by exposing the content of lectures at the University of Nanterre show that they have two crucial insights: they perceive that their own activities at Nanterre are a part of an inter-connected system of activities which encompass the entire world society; and they perceive

place," and hires propagandists, manipulators and educators who make the worker "like" his condition, or at least accept it. This structural relation between the worker and the capitalist is the integument of capitalist society, it is the shell in which the quantitative changes take place.

It is this shell which began to crack in May. It is this structure which starts to disintegrate, not piecemeal, but all at once. The development of society's productive forces, the centralization of capital and the integration of economic activity, the growth of socially combined and scientifically coordinated production processes, make the capitalist shell increasingly vulnerable. The workers, united by the capitalist under the same roof, cooperative with each other because of the exigencies of the work itself, highly educated to be able to manage the sophisticated technology, no longer tolerate their situation, they no longer tolerate the existence of the capitalist, they no longer tolerate the alienation of their labor and the transformation of their labor into a commodity. Educated, proud of their work, confident in their abilities, they begin to express themselves about the fact that they are reduced to tools. Each finds his own observations confirmed by those of others. The workers become class conscious. They gain confidence in their power, they become conscious of their collective power. They communicate their consciousness to other workers.

The workers start to take over; they start to take possession of the productive forces (the former "capital"), and with these powerful productive forces they can destroy the concentrated power of the capitalist class: the State and its repressive apparatus. The capitalist shell starts to burst; the expropriators begin to be expropriated.

This is the beginning of socialist revolution. It is the beginning of a world-wide event: the destruction of capitalism as a unified, world system; the negation of alienation. It is an adventure, the beginning of a process of social creation.

When the Sud-Aviation workers occupied their factory "in the style of the student demonstrators," they were not merely expressing their sympathy with the student demonstrators. And when other workers occupied their factories, they were not demanding more consumer goods in exchange for their alienated labor. Some workers had profoundly understood what was happening in the universities. This was not the traditional "social conflict" between "labor and management." At the Renault automobile factory in Cleon, for example, "the initiative was taken by about 200 young workers, members of the unions (the General Confederation of Labor and the French Democratic Federation of Labor), but who seemed to be acting spontaneously, following the model of the students; there was no social conflict in the establishment."[19] In fact, the unions also understood that this was not a traditional strike, that the student example had nothing to do with quantitative improvements within the context of capitalist society, and both unions declared "their resolve not to share the responsibility over the movement with the students, and their will not to permit overflows which could lead to anarchy."[20]

The physical occupation of the factories was the first step towards "anarchy." The next step would be for workers to use factory workshops and yards as places for collective expression. This happened in a few factories. But only a few. The unions begin to take control of the movement. And the unions have no interest in letting creative expression "overflow" into the workshops. It becomes urgent for the students to communicate their example. This is the task of the Censier worker-student committees. To do this, the committees not only have to struggle against the capitalist propaganda, but also against the announced opposition of the unions. "We no longer want to confide our demands to union professionals, whether or not they're political. We want to take our affairs into

[19] *Le Monde*, May 18, 1968, p. 3.
[20] *Le Monde*, May 18, 1968, p. 3.

The Partial Character of the Revolutionary Theory

What happened in May? Was it a spontaneous and incoherent uprising of various sections of the population, or a coherent step on the part of a determined revolutionary movement? Was it a blind eruption of accumulated complaints and dissatisfactions, or a conscious attempt to overthrow a social order? Did the student movement which set off the explosion have a coherent revolutionary theory, and a strategy based on the theory? If it had a theory, to what extent was it communicated to the action committees, to the workers?

There were unquestionably elements of revolutionary theory at the origin of the movement. This is illustrated by the fact that students in Nanterre began a struggle against the American war in Vietnam and were able to relate the activities of their own university to this war. This does not mean that the "majority" of the fighting students explicitly grasped the connection between their own daily lives and the war in Vietnam. Most students undoubtedly grasped the war as a distant struggle between David and Goliath, they grasped it as a spectacle in which they had sympathy for one side. But a small number of students acted on a much more profound understanding the moment they engaged themselves in a struggle to unveil the connection between the university, the capitalist system, and the war in Vietnam. To these students the war in Vietnam ceased to be an "issue" and became an integral part of their own daily lives.

production by a new separate group, nor a new illegitimate usurpation of social power by new "leaders," but the appropriation of the social means of production by the living members of society, and the destruction of separate power. Consequently, revolutionaries whose aim is to liberate daily life betray their project when they abdicate to passivity or impose themselves over it: the point is to wake the dead, to force the passive to choose between a conscious acceptance of constraint or a conscious affirmation of life.

our own hands. Our objectives cannot be realized without live, concrete and daily information, without a constant, human and imaginative contact between workers and students."[21]

The "constant, human and imaginative contact between workers and students" had been established at Censier since the first day of the occupation; this was the basis for the formation of the worker-student committees. On the night of the occupation, "young workers who had demonstrated in the Latin Quarter, entered a French university for the first time, and were more numerous than the students. They all discuss, sometimes in a disorganized manner, a little too enthusiastically, but everyone is aware that the abstract phrases about the liaison between workers and students can be bypassed."[22] Worker-student solidarity, creative self-expression, collective learning, consciousness of collective power, are all facts at Censier; they have to be communicated to the rest of the population. Creative self-expression and self-organization in one building or one factory are like a strike carried out by one worker.

A worker-student committee is formed for every major enterprise, district, region. The committees include workers from the enterprise, workers from other enterprises, French students, foreign students, professors. The names on the doors of former classrooms refer to places: Renault, Citroën, 5th District, 18th District. The committees are not named according to programs, political lines or strategies, because they have no programs, lines or strategies. Their aim is to communicate to workers what has taken place at Censier. Self-led and self-organized, they do not go out to "lead the population" or to "organize the workers." They know they're not up to this task in any case; but they also know that even if they succeeded in this, they would fail in accomplishing their goal: they would merely reintroduce the type of dependence, the type of relation between leaders and led, the type of hierarchic structure,

[21] Leaflet: "Personnel d'Air-Inter et Air France," May 16, 1968.
[22] "L'Occupation," *Action*, May 13, 1968, p. 7.

which they'd only just started struggling to destroy. When a "revolutionary" grouplet takes up residence in Censier, puts its name on a door, and starts to "help" action committee militants with problems of "political program" and "strategy" so that the militants will be able to "lead the workers" more effectively, the militants of several action committees burst into the office of the "revolutionary vanguard," call the experts on revolution professors and even cops, and give them an ultimatum: either learn with us or join the Authorities outside.

Committee militants go to the factory gates to talk to strikers, to exchange information, to communicate. They do not go there to substitute themselves for the union leaders, but to stimulate the workers to organize themselves, to take control away from the union leaders and into their own hands. "The political and union leaders did not initiate the strike. The strikers themselves, unionized or not, made the decisions, and it is they who should make the decisions." For this to become possible, the action committee militants call for a "reunion of all the strikers, unionized or not, in a continual General Assembly. In this Assembly, the workers will freely determine their action and their goal, and they will organize concrete tasks like the strike pickets, the distribution of food, the preparation of demonstrations…"[23] The action committee militants call on the workers to transform the occupied factory into a place for collective expression by the workers.

Workers who are contacted by the Censier militants, or who are reached by the leaflets, do express themselves, they do discuss, and through discussions they do become conscious of their power. However, it was not in the factories that they expressed themselves, but in the "liberated zone," in Censier. By letting Censier become the place for the creative expression of workers, the place for collective learning, the workers failed to transform the factories into

[23] Leaflet: "Camarades," Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Sorbonne and Censier, May 20, 1968.

more, the condition for their coming to power is precisely the maintenance of this passivity. It's precisely the sheep-like behavior of the workers that permits the mini-bureaucrats to assume the power which had previously been assumed by capitalists, state functionaries, union bureaucrats. The separate power of a separate social group continues to rule over people's activities, only now the ruling group calls itself "revolutionary" and may even call its directorates "workers' councils."

The justification for this behavior on the part of the mini-bureaucrats is the supposed "lack of consciousness" among the workers. However, what these "revolutionaries" call consciousness is the theory which will justify this particular group's assumption of state power. What they call consciousness is the theory which rationalizes the separate power of this particular group. "Consciousness" is what enables the bureaucracy to hold power over society as a separate group while defining itself as "the mass of the workers;" it is the theory which makes it possible for this bureaucracy to imagine that its particular rule is the rule of all. The same passivity, the same spectacle, the same alienation of labor persists, only now the factory director is a party functionary, the foremen are all members of a "workers' council," and the new language which describes this situation is a set of euphemisms which in themselves represent a new stage of linguistic development.

This bureaucratic conception of "power" and "consciousness" is not a rejection of the constraints of capitalist daily life. The bureaucratic "Revolutionary Party" which defines its action within a sea of passivity struggles to become the central constraint of daily life.

However, inactivity and spontaneism, an attitude which holds that "we can't substitute ourselves for the workers," is not the opposite of the bureaucratic conception, since such inactivity represents an abdication to the constraints and conventions of capitalist daily life. The point is to break down the indifference, the dependence, the passivity which characterize daily life in capitalist society. The point is not a new illegitimate appropriation of the social means of

erism" set in; watching the workers in front of the factory was a more important "action" than exposing capitalist ideology or rejecting a separatist architecture. The will to engage in the entire social process disappeared; what took its place was the same kind of specialization, the same kind of ritual repetition, which characterizes daily life in capitalist society.

The passivity of the militants in front of the factory and the sheep-like behavior of the workers who let themselves be herded around by bureaucrats — this is the situation which mini-bureaucrats interpret as a confirmation of everything they've always known; this is the situation that "confirms the absolute necessity of a Revolutionary Party." As they see it, the "spontaneous action of the masses" (the action committee people, for example) cannot take over the factories, and the "spontaneous action of the workers" can only lead to liberal reformism. Consequently, the "only solution" is for the workers to shift their allegiance from the "reformists" to the "revolutionaries" (the mini-bureaucracies); the workers must "recognize" the mini-bureaucracy as "the revolutionary vanguard which will lead them to a different kind of life." "Being recognized" by the workers as their "vanguard" means getting the passive support of the workers; this support will make it possible for the mini-bureaucrats to place themselves into all the positions of power in society. This support will make it possible for the Party to "take state power," namely to head every bureaucratic hierarchy and to dispense repression. In order to "take state power," the "revolutionary Party" must convince the workers that the Party "represents the workers' true interests" and, once in power, will satisfy all of the workers' demands. Defining themselves as the only ones able to realize "socialism," the mini-bureaucrats promise a future in which the activities people engage in will not be projects, but external spectacles carried out by separate groups — in other words, a future daily life which is identical to daily life in capitalist society, with the "major difference" that the former mini-bureaucrats become transformed into "the government." Furthermore

places for creative self-expression. In Censier the workers liberated themselves; they did not overthrow the capitalist system. In Censier, revolution was an idea, not an action.

The discussions at the Censier general assemblies were heated. Conflicting conceptions of workers' power, of socialism, of revolution, clashed. But the discussions were liberating. The starting point of every discussion was the actual situation of the occupants of Censier: the constituents decided about and controlled their own activity; they did not give their power to leaders, delegates or representatives who controlled them in their name. This was not exploitation for a different price, or by different people; it was a different quality of life. And speakers drew conclusions from this qualitative transformation of social relations.

> "In our opinion socialism must be defined as *the overthrow of the relations of production.* This is the fundamental point which allows us to unmask all the bourgeois and bureaucratic tendencies which call themselves socialist."

Two principal tendencies are then unmasked:

> — the first defines socialism as the nationalization of means of production and as planning. It's obvious that nationalization can change property relations, but it cannot in any way change relations of production. Concretely, the worker continues to submit to a hierarchic authority in the process of production and in all other areas of social life. This current is represented in France by the French Communist Party, which proposes this model of socialism as a long-term objective. It is also represented by pro-Chinese grouplets and by numerous other micro-bureaucracies who advertise their Bolshevism.

— the second current, composed of intelligent social-democrats,… insists on the notion of worker-management, but without ever posing the problem of the overthrow of capitalism. Thus they present conceptions of co-management and self-management which can easily be assimilated by capitalism, since, in the context of the present system, they will at best lead to a situation where *the workers manage their own exploitation*. This current is represented in France by certain anarchist groups, and above all, in a more elaborated form, by the centralist bureaucracy of the United Socialist Party (P.S.U.), which has gained some influence in the present crisis through its intermediaries in the leadership of the U.N.E.F. (The student union) and the S.N.E. Sup. (the professors' union). The same theses are presented, with some variants, by the leadership of the C.F.D.T. (French Democratic Federation of Labor)."

These conceptions are abandoned. They are replaced by a generalization of what is in fact taking place at Censier, namely a generalization of a real experience.

"Our conception of socialism is the following:

— the workers directly organize and control the entire process of production and all other aspects of social life. The organs of this organization and control cannot be defined in advance. We can only say that the organization will not be carried out by a party or by a union… This obviously implies the suppression of all hierarchies, on all levels.[24]

[24] "Rapport d'Orientation" (Orientation Report), read and discussed at the General Assembly of the Workers-Students Action Committees of Censier on May

two or three days, the worker-student committees of Censier were thought to be the point of synthesis of the entire movement. There was a vague feeling that the people who had gathered there were determined to liberate all the means of production for the free development of everyone. It was this feeling that accounted for the sudden excitement around Censier: its general assemblies grew immense, people came from all over Paris to "join" action committees, to ask what they could do in their own neighborhoods. People wanted to be part of this process of liberation. This only lasted for about two days.

This spirit of synthesis, this attempt to integrate one's fragmentary existence into a significant whole, came to an end as soon as the spectacle reaffirmed itself at the gates of the factories. Inside the Citroën Committee, for example, the attempt to synthesize one's life, to make a whole out of a fragment, was suddenly dead. Only a vague perception that "something unusual" had been felt the day the strikes began remained with the militants. And this vague perception had some extremely ironic consequences. The first day the militants went to the factories was felt to be so significant, it carried so much psychological importance in the minds of the militants, that they tried, for a month afterward, to recapture the 'spirit' of that day. And the actual result was a ritualistic repetition of going to the factories day after day — and through this repetition, specialization and separation returned. They became specialists in the kind of thing they had done on the first day of the strike. They traveled to the factories, they distributed leaflets, they spoke to workers. But there was a tragic difference between these later excursions and the first visit to the factory. On the day of the strike, they had gone to be part of the entire social process, they had wanted to learn everything. But when they became specialists in "worker-student actions," they lost interest in everything else. They now considered themselves different from the commissions engaged in exposing and analyzing capitalist ideology, from artists undermining the basis for a specialized art. A vulgar kind of "work-

"militants" rationalised their dependence, their inaction, by saying that the CGT "took over." But the relation is mutual. The militants, together with the workers, created the power of the union bureaucracy. The militants did not go to the factory to liberate themselves; they waited for an inexistent power to liberate them.

Once the strike was under the control of the union bureaucracy, other habits of capitalist daily life returned among the militants. Perhaps the most significant "relapse" was the acceptance of division and separation among different social groups. Even though the committees were composed of workers as well as "intellectuals," and even though committee members ceased to separate each other into these two categories, they developed a "specialist" attitude which separated committee militants from both workers as well as "intellectuals." At the factory they separated themselves from the workers. And in the university they began to separate themselves from "students." The militants developed the attitude that "We are engaged in the most important process because we're going to the factories." There was a self-righteousness about this attitude which was unjustified, since no coherent analysis of the actual importance of the actions was ever made. Contrasted to this lack of self-analysis was a contemptuous attitude towards all committees engaged in "student problems." Perhaps some of the contempt was justified, but the point is that the worker-student committee militants felt no obligation to even find out what the "student" committees were doing. It was automatically assumed that going to the doors of the factories to watch the sheep-like behavior of workers in the face of bureaucrats was, *prima facie*, more important than anything else that was being done anywhere.

This acceptance of social separation was a relapse in the sense that the people who originally gathered in Censier had begun to break such lines down. Between May 17 and May 20, at the outbreak of the strike, people abandoned their varied separate activities, like literature, specialized jobs. They came to Censier to synthesize their activities in a collective project. For a period of about

This is a call for the death of capitalism, a call for the appropriation of social power by society, a call for workers to appropriate the productive power alienated to capitalists, a call for people to appropriate the decision-making power alienated to the tops of hierarchies, a call for everyone to appropriate the power to think and act alienated to specialists and representatives.

It's the last week in May. Increasing numbers of workers take part in the general assemblies at Censier and at other universities. This is no "grouplet," no "vanguard party;" it's a revolutionary mass movement. At this point it is ludicrous to Censier militants that at some universities there are still "students" discussing university reform and reorganization.

For the Censier militants, "anything is possible." The potentialities of the revolutionary situation are elaborated in leaflets, in general assembly discussions.

> "All the programs and structures of the traditional working-class organizations have exploded. The question of power has been posed. It's no longer a question of replacing one government with another, nor of replacing one regime with another. It's a question of installing the Power of the entire working class over the whole society; it's a question of the abolition of class society."[25]

Not only in France, but in the entire capitalist region. The destruction of the capitalist state and its repressive apparatus (the army and the police), the force which protects the transfer of the world's wealth from "backward" to "developed" regions and from lower to upper classes, is eliminated. The lack of a regime, of a government, makes it as urgent to extend the revolution beyond the

25 (?), 1968.

[25] Leaflet: "Que Faire?" Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Censier, May 25, 1968.

borders of France as it is to extend it beyond the borders of Censier. This point is made in a general assembly; it raises a furor; it's a point that hasn't been raised by revolutionary socialists since the victory of Stalin's conception of "socialism in one country."

> "In Belgium, in Germany, in Italy, in England, in Holland, in all capitalist countries, struggles similar to ours or in solidarity with our struggle, are developing."[26]

The economy is paralyzed. All places of work are occupied by the workers. The power of the capitalist regime is suspended:

> "…it has lost its factories, it has lost control over economic activity, it has lost its wealth. It has lost everything; all it has left is power: this has to be taken."[27]

The question of power is posed. The first step is realized: the producers physically occupy the places of work: "the red flag of the working class and not that of a party floats everywhere." The next step is for the workers to express themselves, "to organize themselves and to develop their enormous capacity for initiative."[28] At this point, expression is translated into action, the consciousness of collective power is followed by the organization of collective power, the strike is transformed into an "active strike." And at that point,

> "…violence is inevitable so long as the menace of losing all they've conquered hangs over the workers, so long as the repressive power of the State continues to exist… Now the workers will have to organize their own

[26] Leaflet: "De Gaulle à la Porte !" Les Comités d'Action, May 24, 1968.
[27] Leaflet: "De Gaulle à la Porte !" Les Comités d'Action, May 24, 1968.
[28] "Que Faire?" Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Censier, May 25,

thing as the workers who were herded into factories by the CGT, and who also accepted, stood, watched, and waited.

One of the favorite arguments of "anarchists" and "libertarians" at Censier was: "The workers must make their own decisions; we cannot substitute ourselves for them." This is a blind application of an anti-bureaucratic tactic to a situation where this tactic had no application at all. It meant that action committee militants had no more of a right to tell workers what to do than a bureaucratic mini-party had. But the situation where this tactic was applied was not the one at which it was aimed. The action committee militants were sections of the population who had achieved some level of self-organization. They were not in front of the factory carrying out a strategy which would lead them to "state power." They may have had no strategy at all; in any case, the action was an action of self-liberation, in the sense of eliminating those conditions of daily life which kept them from living. This self-liberation could only have been carried through if they eliminated the obstacles to their self expression. The obstacles to their liberation were in the factories, as means of production which were "alien" to them, which "belonged" to a separate group.

By telling themselves that it was "up to the workers" to take the factories, a "substitution" did in fact take place, but it was the opposite "substitution" from the one the anarchists feared. The militants substituted the inaction (or rather the bureaucratic action) of the workers' bureaucracies, which was the only "action" the workers were willing to take, for their own action. The anarchist argument, in fact, turned the situation upside down. The militants thus went in front of the factories and allowed the bureaucrats to act instead of them; they substituted the bureaucracy's action for their own. Later they apologized for their own inaction by talking about the "betrayal" of the CGT. But the CGT was not "to blame" for anything. When the "militants" went to the factory gates and watched, they did no more than the workers who stood and watched. And when the workers watched, they allowed the CGT to act for them. The

And nothing dramatic happens; the sheep slowly get herded into the stable.

And the Citroën Committee militants? Well, we helped the bureaucrats herd the sheep in. Why? We said, "the workers still accept the power of the CGT" and our response to that was to accept the power of the CGT. None of us took the microphone to inform the workers who we were, to tell them what we intended to do. Suddenly we were completely helpless, we were victims of "external forces" that moved outside us. People who are used to submitting continued submitting.

The reason we were there was some kind of realization that personal liberation had to pass through the social liberation of all the means of production. There was also a knowledge that the workers, by alienating their labor, produce Capital as well as the capitalist means of repression. Yet when we went to the factory for these reasons, and didn't fight, what we had done in the street and in Censier had something of a partial character, because through our action at the factory we accepted the repression and we accepted property. Did we realize it was a question of socializing the means of production then or never, that this was the situation we had wanted to create for years as militants? Suddenly the situation was there, and we were at the crucial place; yet we felt no anger either at the pushing cowboys or at the cows still allowing themselves to be pushed. This lack of anger reflects passivity. We hadn't really liberated ourselves; we didn't grasp the means of production as ours, as instruments for our development which were being blocked by the bureaucrats and by the workers.

We fought the police at one end, and at the other end we told ourselves that the self-appointed union guards were to control the instruments with which means of repression are produced. We caught the spirit of liberation at the barricades, yet by the time we got to the places where repression originates, namely at the places of production, we had lost our anger, we stopped fighting the repression. We accepted. Yet by accepting, we did exactly the same

> power everywhere in order to destroy this repressive power at its roots… The workers must prepare themselves by organizing armed retaliation to any provocation … They must destroy the very sources of power by making the bourgeoisie useless, by taking over the organization of production and distribution."[29]
>
> "…the state apparatus, whether bourgeois or bureaucratic, is destroyed. There is no longer any specialized repressive corps (police, army, etc.); these bodies have given way to *the general armament of the working population*."[30]

Capitalism is destroyed; alienation is annihilated; an adventure begins: the working population organizes its own social activities; people consciously create their own material and social conditions.

These perspectives were expressed in the general assemblies of Censier. However, Censier was not the place where expression could be translated into social action, where the consciousness of collective power could be transformed into an organization of collective power, where the strike could be transformed into an active strike. And when, at the very end of May, the workers of a chemical plant told the assembly that they had begun to express themselves in their factory, everyone understood. "Until now we've been kept from speaking; but we've taken the floor, we've learned to speak, and this is irreversible."[31] They had formed rank and file committees "composed of all the workers of a sector. The committee is the

1968.

[29] "Que Faire?" Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Censier, May 25, 1968.

[30] "Rapport d'Orientation," (Orientation Report), read and discussed at the General Assembly of the Workers-Students Action Committees of Censier on May 25 (?), 1968.

[31] Leaflet: "Rhône-Poulenc," Le Comité Centrale de Grève (Rhône Poulenc, Central Strike Committee), May 28, 1968.

expression of the will of the workers." This is what *had* to be done in all the factories when the strike began; this is what *will* be done when the next strike begins. The perspectives were in the past, or in the future; it had not been done; Censier had served as a substitute.

The Unveiling of Repression and Propaganda

Revolution is as much of a threat to the Communist Party as to the factory owners. The Party has acquired a vested interest in the law and order of capitalist society: it has enormous financial resources, a formidable electoral machine, and controls France's major union. It has vested interests in its long-range political program and in its strategy for eventual parliamentary victory. It has a vested interest in its fabulous bureaucratic structure. The Communist Party could not have "led" the working class to revolution. "Waldeck-Rochet for Dictator of the Proletariat"[32] would in any case have been a ludicrous slogan in a literate society in the middle of the 20th Century. The conquest of power by the workers would have put an end to the Communist Party's political program and to its strategy for parliamentary victory; it would have annihilated the Party's financial resources, its electoral machine, and its union. To have contributed to the conquest of power by the workers, the Communist Party would have had to bury itself. But the Communist Party is one of the major political forces in modern capitalist society: like other institutions, it has a vested interest in its own continued existence. Consequently, the power, the experience and the knowledge of the Party and the General Federation of Labor were all mobilized to destroy the revolution.

The Government and the Union, the Capitalists and the Communists, mobilized their instruments of repression and propaganda to keep the student example from overflowing into the working class.

[32] Waldeck-Rochet is the top official of the French Communist Party.

The passivity which characterized the "American Left" at Censier also characterized the main "actions" of the most "active" committees of Censier, such as the Citroën Committee. When the strike broke out we went to the Citroën factory expecting some kind of fraternization, perhaps dancing in the streets. But what we found was a situation which looked like cowboys herding stubborn cows, namely the CGT bureaucrats trying to herd workers into the factory, with no contact or communication between the bureaucrats and the "masses." The workers had no conception of what was happening to them; they merely stood, waited, and watched the bureaucrats shouting through megaphones.

Everyone watched and no one lived. A bureaucrat shouted a speech, his delegates baaa'd loudly, these cheerleaders called for "enthusiasm" from the spectators, the indifferent "mass." "Masses" is what people become in capitalist society; they visibly transform themselves into herds of animals waiting to be pushed around. Things pass in front of the eyes of the "mass," but the "mass" doesn't move, it doesn't live; things happen to it. This time the bureaucrats were trying to cheer them into pushing themselves inside the factory gates, because the Central Committee had called for a "general strike with factory occupations."

This is the situation when two groups arrive at the factory gate: the Worker-Student Action Committee from Censier, and a Marxist-Leninist group with a large banner, a group called "To Serve the People" (Servir le Peuple). The militants of the Citroën Committee from Censier distribute a leaflet supporting the workers' "demands," while the other group "Serve the People" by placing themselves next to the factory gate in a "strike picket" which serves no function whatever. Gradually the militants of both groups become passive, stand aside, and wait for the "autonomous action of the workers;" they look at the workers (mainly foreign) on the other side of the street. It suddenly becomes a spectacle where everyone is watching and each is waiting for all the others to act.

again a spectacle. The militants were not, in fact, liberated; they did not in fact act as if the society was theirs; they did not act as if society consisted of people with whom to carry out projects, limited only by the available instruments and the available knowledge. Even inside of Censier, a retrogression took place: a division of labor installed itself; special groups did the mimeographing, the cooking, the leaflet distribution.

There were even people in Censier to whom nothing at all was communicated. A group of Americans set up an "action committee of the American Left." This was an example of complete passivity on the part of an entire "action committee." Many of them were draft resisters who had made a decision once, and had "retired" immediately after making it. They went to the Paris demonstrations, to the barricades, to Censier — not as active participants changing their world, but as spectators, as observers watching the activity of others. The events were totally external to them; the events had no link with their own lives; they did not sense the world as their world. Consequently what they saw was a different kind of people, the French, struggling against a different type of society, French Gaullist society. They were "on the side" of the revolutionaries, the same way one is "on the side" of a particular team in a game. This group was the symbol of an attitude which characterized many others who came to Censier, attended assemblies and committee meetings, and watched, and waited — like dead things. They absorbed a new commodity, a new spectacle, which was exciting and stimulating because of its newness. Such attitudes were a dead weight on whatever personal liberation did take place at Censier. These symbols of deadness demobilized others, they made it harder for others to realize they had a power which these people didn't dream of taking.

Some people reached the point of asking someone "what can I do?" and thus already took a step toward living. But when no one gave them "a good answer," they lapsed back into passivity.

One of the government's first acts was to have the police occupy the radio transmission center (at the Eiffel Tower).

One of the Union's first acts was to take absolute control over every loudspeaker system in every occupied factory. Both the Capitalist and the Communist press repeated the "news" about students concerned over tests and workers concerned over wages, hoping to bring this situation into existence by mentioning it endlessly.

The press did not mention the fact that the students were running their own social activities. This was not due to ignorance, or to lack of information. Censier, for example, was wide open to the public, to the press, even to cops (in plain clothes, obviously; they weren't invited, but they came; no one stopped them). Reporters went to Censier; they looked for the leaders, the responsibles, the organizational headquarters, and they found none. They were disappointed, unimpressed; nothing was happening at Censier, and in any case it was anarchy and chaos. A population who depended on orders from superiors, on instructions from leaders, was not told that the population of Censier had done away with superiors and leaders.

In fact, all the techniques known to the "science of information" were used to keep the population asleep, to reinforce their dependence on superiors, leaders, spokesmen, bosses. If leaders didn't exist, then they had to be invented. The press itself went on to install the Spokesmen, the Representatives, the Leaders. Obscure bureaucrats, vigorous professors, outspoken militants, were transformed by the press into the Lenins, the Maos and the Ches of the Revolution. Thus Jacques Sauvageot, vice-president of the student union, became the Spokesman of the Student Movement; Alain Geismar, former secretary of the professors' union, became the Representative of the enraged students and professors; and Daniel Cohn-Bendit became the Leader of the Madmen.

Dany Cohn-Bendit was the favorite. His German origins were pointed out so as to keep anti-Germans well informed about the situation, and his Jewish origins were pointed out to put anti-Semites

on guard. Then the situation was clear to all of the middle class, and to most of the working class: their polite sons and daughters had been led to violent, irresponsible, anarchistic, anti-Patriotic demonstrations by a little foreign agitator. And the choice was made lucidly clear for all responsible people. It was all a matter of one or another Leader. Did the Frenchman prefer a responsible, even if slightly senile, De Gaulle, or a German-Jewish Anarchist? Did the worker prefer a responsible, even if slightly bureaucratic, union official, or a German-Jewish Anarchist? The circus had to end; the factory owners, the government and the press had grown tired of it; workers had to return to their jobs, students to their tests. Everyone would have a chance to vote for his preferred Leader in the coming election.

The Union's major task was to keep the occupied factories from being transformed into places where the workers could express themselves creatively. This had to be done without the intervention of the police, if possible, since an inopportune attack by the cops during the general strike could have led workers to start organizing their self-defense. The union managed this operation soon after the outbreak of the strike. Union officials placed themselves at the head of the "movement"; they held on to all the loudspeakers and "initiated" the occupation of the factory; the Union bureaucracy then proceeded to "occupy" the factory instead of the workers. Inside the Union-occupied factory, no one expressed himself: union officials read prepared speeches over the loudspeakers to an audience composed largely of union delegates. The workers inside the factory were not all enthusiastic about the "occupation"; those who were unenthusiastic did not applaud the speeches read by officials over loudspeakers, and in the evening they went to Censier to analyze what had to be done.

Action committee militants were aware of what was happening. "The policy of the union leaders is extremely clear; unable to oppose the strike, they're trying to isolate the most combative workers inside the factories, they're trying to let the strike rot so as to

The passive, cheering attitude of the TV-watcher which existed at the first assemblies is transformed into an active attitude. Instead of passively observing what THEY (an external, separate force) are going to do, for example about the cooking in Censier, YOU speak up because you prefer clean to dirty food and because you have the power to change the situation of the kitchen. Once you participate actively, once action is no longer the specialty of a separate group, you suddenly realize that you have power over larger projects than the Censier kitchen: the "institutions" of society lose their character of external spectacles and come into focus as social projects which can be determined by you together with others.

This description is exaggerated; it's an attempt to characterize an attitude. In actuality, such attitudes expressed themselves as tendencies. For example, when some of the bureaucrats of the future appointed themselves to a "service of order" or to a "strike committee" which was to rule Censier under the guise of coordinating its activities, people did not simply watch them "take over," whispering to each other about the villainy of the act. People were angry: they took the necessary steps to prevent the installation of any self-appointed "coordinating committee." They knew that a "central committee" would once again make decisions and undertake actions instead of the occupants, and the newly liberated occupants refused to give up their power, their possibility to act, to decide. When a "service of order" planted itself at the entrance to a general assembly and claimed that "foreigners" could not participate in that assembly, the "service of order" was quickly removed by people inside the assembly.

However, the sense that every individual in the building ran the building, the feeling that if there was something he didn't like he had to act, together with others, to change it — this sense of an individual's social power, this liberation of the individual, was not extended outside Censier. As soon as people left Censier they were once again helpless; some separate group (March 22 Movement, The Working Class) once again became the actor in what was once

something which is not my project and to which I'll be bound for the rest of my life.

By pursuing the constrained daily life of capitalist society, the individual performs certain activities because of convention, because he defines himself as someone who has no choice. My activities depend on external circumstances. I do certain things because they are the ones that are permitted. I do not act in terms of my possibilities, but in terms of external constraints.

Social change takes place within capitalist society, but it is not perceived by me as a project which I bring about together with others. The change is external to me; it is a spectacle; it results from huge impersonal forces: a nation, a state, a revolutionary movement… These forces are all external to me, they are not the outcome of my own daily activity. They are the actors on the stage, the players in a game, and I simply watch. I may take sides and cheer for one side or the other, for the villain or the hero. But I'm not in it.

In Censier, in the general assemblies during the early days of the occupation, activity had the character of a project: the external spectacle had been destroyed, and so had the dependence (since the dependence is nothing but the characteristic role of the member of an audience who watches the spectacle). Most people originally went to Censier as spectators, they went to see what "the revolutionaries" were going to do next, they went to a show. But by attending one after another assembly where people discussed what to do about the building, about Paris, about the world, they were confronted with the awareness that they were not observing a separate group, a group of actors on the stage. One quickly realized that it's the person sitting next to him, in front or behind him, who defined what was to be done in Censier, and what has to be done outside Censier. These assemblies did not have the character of external spectacles, but of personal projects which one carries out with people one knows: the subjects were activities which would affect all those who made decisions about them.

make the strikers accept the agreement which they'll reach with the bosses. And the bosses are in fact ready to negotiate, to give some union leaders more power, the way their likes have already done in other countries. If they have to, they won't hesitate to recognize the union local, in order to increase their control over, and to minimize, the workers' demands."[33]

The Union's next major task is to prevent contacts between the workers and the students, to keep the consciousness of collective power from overflowing into the factories. This is done by a combination of propaganda and force. On the level of propaganda, the workers are told that the problems of students have nothing in common with the problems of workers; that students are worried about tests and want to have a Modern University, and that in any case the students' Leader, Dany Cohn-Bendit, has no understanding of the workers' problems and cannot negotiate for the workers' consequently, the workers must let the union officials negotiate for them. On the level of force: the workers are locked in, the students are locked out. The majority of workers, in fact, are not inside the factory; they're kept away by the fact that nothing happens there; these workers are home, listening to the government on the radio, reading the bourgeois press, and waiting for the strike to end; they're safely removed from the possibility of becoming conscious of anything.

The minority of workers who occupy the factory are locked in; thus they're kept away from the action committee militants outside, and they're exposed to the speeches inside. The strike pickets appointed by Union and Party officials play cards and wait for the strike to end. The action committee militants who come to the factory entrances get as far as the strike pickets, who are instructed not to let the militants inside, not to let the militants talk to workers, not to take the "provocators and adventurists" seriously, and

[33] Leaflet: "Camarades," Comité d'Action Travailleurs-Etudiants, Sorbonne and Censier, May 20, 1968.

to chase them away by any means necessary in case crowds of workers collect around them.

In factories occupied in this manner, no one expresses anything, no one learns; the level of consciousness remains where it was before the strike. The workers are told by their "spokesmen" that what they want is higher wages and improved conditions, and that only the union can negotiate these gains for them. The whole strike is reduced to the problem of quantitative improvements and material gains within capitalist society. Locked into the factories by appointed strike pickets, spoken-for by union officials, told by loudspeakers and press that the militants outside are anarchistic provocators who follow an irresponsible foreign Leader, the workers become even more dependent. Chained to a context in which all their powers are alienated, the workers view their possibilities from the vantage point of powerlessness — and from this vantage point, nothing is possible and nothing is learned.

For example, when peasants contact Censier and offer chickens at cost price, and when other peasants offer potatoes free, action committee militants are excited: it's the beginning of the active strike. Trucks have to be placed at the service of the strikers to deliver the food. Militants approach the strike picket of an auto factory. The union guards at the entrance aren't interested. The Boss wouldn't give permission to let the strikers use one of his trucks, and in any case the Union Canteen buys its food through established channels. Union officials hear about the proposition. Like small businessmen they calculate the quantitative gains for the union treasury. They accept: it's a good buy. They send a union truck for the food. Communist officials and a Communist strike committee cannot imagine any social relations other than capitalist relations.

Thus the occupied factories are not transformed into places for expression and learning; general assemblies are not formed; workers do not become conscious of their collective power, and they do not appropriate society's productive forces. The appropriation

Partial Liberation of the Militants

How can we explain this passivity, during a period of crisis, among militants who consider themselves revolutionary activists in normal times? Why did they suddenly depend on the action of others?

The actions of the Nanterre students begin as a struggle for total liberation. To what extent did the actions of the Censier committees have this character?

In the first Censier assemblies, and in the street fights, something appeared which broke with the constraints, the obstacles of daily life in capitalist society. As soon as students built barricades, occupied public buildings, recognized no authority within those buildings, they communicated the liberating character of the movement: nothing is sacred, neither habits nor authorities. The regularities of yesterday are rejected today. And it is the regularities of yesterday that make my life regular today: constrained, well-defined and dead. The liberation comes precisely from my independence of convention: I'm born in a certain age which has certain instruments of production and certain kinds of knowledge; I have the possibility to combine my ability with my knowledge, and can use the socially available means of production as instruments with which to realize an individual or collective project. In carrying out an activity, I no longer recognize the constraints of capitalist daily life: I no longer recognize the right of policemen to decide what can and cannot be done with means of production that have been socially created; I no longer recognize the legitimacy of a state or academic bureaucracy which forces me into a system of learning to train me for

However, this "perspective," this "direction," turned out to be nothing more than an eloquent speech which countered the position of a Maoist or a Trotskyist. The eloquence masked the fact that the speaker did not feel that social property was his in reality; it was only his philosophically, and he "socialized it" philosophically. The "socialization of the means of production" was not conceived as a practical activity, but as an ideological position opposed to the ideological position of "nationalization," just as "self-organization by the workers" was a concept opposed to the concept of "a revolutionary party." The eloquent speeches were not accompanied by eloquent actions, because the speaker did not regard himself as deprived; it was "the workers" who were deprived, and consequently "only the workers" could act. The speaker called on workers to have a conviction which the speaker didn't have; he called on workers to translate words into actions, but his own "action" consisted only of words.

of social power by the working population would have meant the transformation of the entire society into a place for collective expression, a place for active, conscious, de-alienated creation. Such anarchy is averted. Toward the end of the strike, rank and file committees are formed in factory after factory. The workers in these committees are acutely aware of the means which were used to avert the appropriation of social power by the workers — this time.

Once the factories are removed from the workers by the Unions, the police attack the universities. In order to justify the repression, scapegoats have to be found. Those who are singled out are the revolutionary grouplets, the vanguards whose importance had declined during the height of the crisis. The revolutionary grouplets are outlawed, several of their members are thrown in jail. It is at this point that the vanguard revolutionaries regain their lost importance. Their role as vanguards has been certified by the capitalist State, and is daily confirmed by the bourgeois press. The banned revolutionaries return to Censier.

This time they're not chased out. Everyone is sympathetic. Meetings to protest the ban are held. Demonstrations to protest the incarceration of comrades are planned. The revolutionaries are followed by cops. A sentinel is placed at the entrance of Censier — for the first time since the occupation. The revolutionary grouplets are fighting to save themselves: it's time to get organized. A frantic atmosphere and elements of paranoia are introduced to Censier.

Censier is transformed. Action committee militants see themselves looked at, the same way students are looked at by professors. The militants are rated, classed. They are once again an underclass: they are politically unformed, they are unshaped dough. They are raw material which is to be coordinated, organized, led.

It is at this point that the worker-student committees leave Censier. The General Assembly of the Worker-Student Action Committees changes its name: it becomes the Inter-enterprise Committee. It is now composed mainly of workers from various enterprises; it becomes an occasion for members of newly formed rank and

file committees to exchange experiences. It no longer meets daily, but once a week. Some individual factory committees, like the Citroën Committee, continue to lead an independent existence. Workers continue to express themselves, to learn, to initiate and to act within the action committees. But the committees are no longer places for the self-expression of all the workers; they're removed from the factories and from the universities. They're groups of people. They have neither a strategy nor a political program. They have a perspective. And they know they've been had; they know how, and by whom.

The repression itself gives birth to the type of "Left" described by the propaganda: a "Left" composed of clandestine societies, persecuted vanguards, tragic leaders, and even students concerned with student problems.

When the general strike is over, when the worker-student committees are gone, Censier becomes "organized" for the first time since its occupation: it acquires an internal hierarchy. The frustrated vanguard revolutionaries, who had not been able to lead, to organize, to plan during the crisis, now bring their talents to Censier. They forge themselves a place in a Central Committee of Occupation. They form a Central Coordinating Committee which assigns rooms to appropriate groups in orderly fashion. They explain that the "anarchists" are gone now; that the ideas of the "anarchists" corresponded to "an earlier stage of the struggle," and that now the "struggle" requires centralization, coordination, leadership. They allocate rooms to new groups — new committees — made up entirely of students. And they preside over commissions on university reorganization and course transformation.

"Student problems" come to Censier for the first time since the occupation. On the heels of the "student problems" come the police. When the police occupy Censier no one tries to defend the building: there's nothing to defend; Censier now consists of a student "mass" concerned with the modalities of a reorganized University, and a

olutionaries" in the march or inside the factory; there were very few people who felt that whatever was inside that plant was *theirs*. There were some people who wanted to "storm the gates" in order to be hit on the head by the CGT cops at the gates. But there was apparently no one inside or outside the factory who regarded it as social property. One who knows it's social property doesn't accept a bureaucrat blocking the door.

People in that march had varied pretexts for doing nothing. "Such action is premature; it's adventuristic ! the plant isn't social property yet." Of course the CGT bureaucrats agreed with this reasoning, a reasoning which completely undermines any "right" the workers might have to strike. And ten thousand militants, most of whom had just gone out of occupied universities to take part in the march, most of whom had actively challenged the legitimacy of the power of the police in the street, blandly accepted the authority of the union toughs who guarded the factory gates.

What attracted people to Censier was the impression that here actions were being prepared which would go beyond the situation which had greeted the demonstrators at the gates of Renault. The Censier general assemblies, as well as the action committee meetings, between May 17 and May 20, gave the impression that here were gathered people determined to go further. Here were "the others" who were going to push the situation beyond its newly reached bureaucratic limits.

A lot of people went to Censier to take part in actions on a completely blind basis. Lots of people who lived completely empty lives found a brief opportunity to give out leaflets; for such people giving out leaflets was, in itself, more meaningful than the normal activities of their daily lives.

But there were also people committed to going beyond leaflet distribution for its own sake, and the possibility of going beyond seemed to exist at Censier. Extremely significant "actions" were discussed at the Censier general assemblies. One got the impression that people had a perspective, a direction.

It must be pointed out that the people at Censier were not "opportunists" in the sense that they were ready to accept any possibilities. They did have a distinctly anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic perspective. This is why they rejected the "leadership" of the bureaucratic mini-groups. It must also be pointed out that there were numerous "political" militants at Censier who were not disposed to turn wherever the wind blew them, and who had relatively clear conceptions about the bureaucratic and capitalist consciousness prevalent among workers, about "workers' councils" and "self-management" as wedges which could be used to undermine this total acceptance of capitalist structures.

However, it must still be asked why the Censier militants did not succeed in pushing the situation a step further. In other words, why did the strike become a traditional bureaucratic strike; why did it fall under the control of union functionaries? The strike could not have been controlled by the CGT if large numbers of people had rejected this bureaucracy's right to represent anyone. The CGT bureaucrats had power within the factories because the workers accepted this power. The bureaucrats are not popular because of the attractiveness of their personalities, they have very little repressive power, and when the wildcat strike broke out, their power had in fact been undermined.

The "take-over" by the CGT already began a day after the factory occupations began, at the Renault plant. About ten thousand people march from the center of Paris; they are ready for a feast with the workers inside the nationalized auto plant. The demonstrators get to the factory, and find the gates shut. Whoever is at the head of this march accepts the closed gates as the last word. But the gates represent nothing; cheering workers stand on the roof; they can send ropes down. And in some parts, the fence of the factory is low enough to climb. Yet suddenly people fear a "power" they had never feared before: the CGT bureaucrats.

If ten thousand people had wanted to get in, the bureaucrats would have had no power. But there were clearly very few "rev-

"vanguard" concerned with keeping itself in the Central Committee. An empty shell is taken by the police.

F. Perlman

Part II. Evaluation and Critique

movement which was ready to do whatever the situation allowed. Subjectively they thought they were revolutionaries because they thought a revolution was taking place; they thought the factories were going to be occupied and "socialized," and they thought they would be among the first to go inside the factories and join the workers in a new system of production. They were not going to initiate this process; they were going to follow the wave wherever it pushed them.

However, when they got to the factory gates on the day of the occupation, they confronted a "slightly different" situation. The workers were not calling for the population to enter the factory. Union bureaucrats were calling for the "occupation" of the factory. And so the militants shifted with the wind: the bureaucrats were calling for a wage strike, so the "revolutionaries" supported the workers' "legitimate demands."

Of course it was "revolutionary," in May, for a group of people to be ready to "socialize" the factories as soon as the situation permitted. But "someone else" was to bring this about; these "militants" were ready to step in after it was done.

If these generalizations characterize the dominant activities of the Censier worker-student action committees, then these committees were not "revolutionary" and their members were not "militants." They represented a section of the population who were ready for the revolutionary change when they thought they were about to be pushed into this change. They were ready to make the choice, but they were not the ones who would initiate the actions which created the situation that forced the choice. In this sense, they had no direction of their own. They went precisely to the places where change was possible, and they were ready to take part, if someone brought it about. Who would bring it about? There was March 22; there were "the workers"; even the Gaullist police were expected to "trip off" a revolution by mistake. But these people were only ready to step into conditions created for them.

Critique of Actions

If the consciousness of the action committee militants did not go beyond the limits of a capitalist and bureaucratic perspective, why were so many "revolutionary militants" attracted to Censier for more than a month after the strike had been taken over by the union? What was the nature of the "actions" of these committees?

The variety of outlooks and political positions gathered together in the Censier committees cannot be characterized as reformist *per se*. They did not come to Censier in order to take part in reformist actions; in terms of what they said, in committee meetings and general assemblies, they made it clear that they thought they were engaging in revolutionary actions, actions which were leading to the abolition of capitalism and bureaucracy. Yet in front of the factories they supported "the workers' demands," they supported "political and union rights," and they called for "autonomous workers' organizations."

In a brief characterization, it may be said that their actions were not reformist *per se*; they were opportunist *per se*. The Censier worker-student committees were at the front lines of the possibilities which the social situation permitted, and there they did whatever the situation permitted. When capitalist society functioned regularly, they did everything which is normally done in capitalist society, accepting all of the limitations of normal capitalist life: wage-strikes, unions. However, in May the opportunity existed for members of the population to engage in the production process, to appropriate the social means of production. And in May they were ready to do this. Opportunism. In this sense, one can say that the people who "agitated" from Censier represent a genuine popular

Limits of the Escalation

Why did we participate in the worker-student action committees? What did we think was happening when the general strike began? What was the basis for what we thought?

Students had ceased to accept the state and academic authorities within the universities. Regularly controlled and managed by the state, and in this sense "state property," the universities were transformed into "social" institutions, where the students determined what was to be done, what was to be discussed, who was to make the decisions and the rules.

At numerous general assemblies, people expressed the awareness that, if the universities were to remain in the hands of people who gathered there, workers had to take control of the factories. In fact, people went to factories to say to workers: "We've taken over the universities. For this to be permanent, you have to take over the factories." Some workers began to "imitate" the student movement independently. At Renault, for example, the strike began before the "students" went there. This is also true of Sud-Aviation. At several other factories, young workers who had joined the students on the barricades began to follow the "example" of the universities by calling for strikes and eventual take-overs of the factories by their workers.

Yet this is where the first critique has to be made. We had not, in fact, understood the full significance of the "model" of the university occupations, and consequently our perspective of "general assemblies in the factories" did not have the basis we thought it had.

is that the union bureaucracy in that factory had created the "rank and file committees" in an attempt to recuperate the agitation taking place among the workers, and furthermore, through its control of a "central strike committee," the union bureaucracy maintained its power in that factory from the beginning to the end of the strike. Some of the workers in the chemical plant saw a potentiality for transforming the rank and file committees into real sources of power of the workers; these workers went to Censier to try to convince others of the urgency of transforming these committees; they defined themselves as militants with the power to change their situation. However, on the basis of what these workers said, the Censier militants did not define concrete actions through which they would transform the rank and file committees; instead, they transformed the statements of these workers into confirmations of the myths about the "spontaneous revolutionary activity of the working class."

On the basis of this mythology, the Censier militants moved yet further away from direct action. The further they got from action carried out by themselves, the more radical became their perspectives for the action of others. They developed conceptions of "self-management by the workers themselves" and conceptions of "active strike" (striking workers were to begin production on their own). In other words, the Censier militants constructed an ideology. They put this ideology into leaflets which were distributed to workers. However, it is ironic that the Censier leaflets spoke of "active strike," of an economy run by the workers themselves, after the union bureaucracy had already gained control of the strike throughout all France. This action no longer took place in reality; it took place in discussions and debates among action committee militants at Censier.

context of this active "mass." These militants regarded themselves as helpless to transform a concrete set of activities.)

Consequently, when the worker-student action committees were founded in Censier, the people at the origin of these committees already defined for themselves a different role from that which had been played by the March 22 Movement and which had been expressed by Dany Cohn-Bendit. The Censier militants formed action committees instead of joining radical workers in transforming social life. It is ironic that the militants constituted "action committees" precisely at the moment when they renounced action. They did have some conception of "action." It is not the same action as that of the March 22 Movement — a particular group of people who themselves transform a concrete social activity. It is action which consists of following the "spontaneous" activity of a social group, particularly "the working class." The aim is "To Serve The People." For example, if workers would occupy a factory and open its doors to the militants, then they would go to help; then there would be no question of "legality."

This lack of direct action by the militants is justified ideologically in the Censier general assemblies through the construction of a mythology about "revolutionary actions" performed by "the workers themselves." Since the militants do not themselves act, but follow the actions of "the people," the myth assures them that "the people" are able to act "spontaneously." The city of Nantes becomes mythologized as a "workers' commune" where workers supposedly rule all the activities of their daily lives, whereas what had happened in Nantes was that a new bureaucracy had temporarily gained power over the distribution network. The same kind of mythology is developed around the supposed "revolutionary activities" of the workers in the Rhône-Poulenc chemical plant. It is said that the workers had thrown out the union bureaucrats and had organized themselves into rank and file committees which ruled the entire factory; here, supposedly, is a perspective of self-organization initiated by workers inside their own factory. The fact

What had happened in the universities was that students, workers and others had taken over state buildings, and assumed for themselves the power formerly wielded by the state. However, they did not "reorganize" or "restructure" the university; they did not substitute a "student-run" university for the state-run university; they did not reform the capitalist university. The occupations did not establish "student-power" in the universities; students did not elect or appoint a new administration, this time a student-bureaucracy, to run the university in the place of the state bureaucracy. In fact, the occupants of the universities rejected the traditional student bureaucracy, the student union (National Union of French Students — UNEF).

What is even more important is that "students" did not "take over" the universities. At the Sorbonne, at Censier, at Nanterre and elsewhere, the university was proclaimed social property; the occupied buildings became exuniversities. The buildings were opened to the entire society — to students, teachers, workers — to anyone who wanted to come in. Furthermore, the ex-universities were run by their occupants, whether or not they were students, workers, townspeople. At Censier, in fact, the majority of the occupants were not "students." This socialization was accompanied by a breakdown of the division of labor, the division between "intellectuals" and "workers." In other words, the occupation represented an abolition of the university as a specialized institution restricted to a special layer of society (students). The ex-university becomes socialized, public, open to everyone.

The general assemblies in the universities were instances of self-organization by the people inside of a specific building, whatever their former specializations. They were not instances of self-organization by students over "their own" affairs.

However, this is as far as the "escalation" went. When the people who organized their activities inside an occupied university went to "the workers," either on the barricades, or in the factories, and when they said to "the workers": "YOU should take over YOUR

factories," they showed a complete lack of awareness about what they were already doing in the ex-universities.

In the ex-universities, the division between "students" and "workers" was abolished in action, in the daily practice of the occupants; there were no special "student tasks" and "worker tasks." However, the action went further than the consciousness. By going to "the workers" people saw the workers as a specialized sector of society, they accepted the division of labor.

The escalation had gone as far as the formation of general assemblies of sections of the population inside the occupied universities. The occupants organized their own activities.

However, the people who "socialized" the universities did not see the factories as SOCIAL means of production; they did not see that these factories have not been created by the workers employed there, but by generations of working people. All they did see, since this is visible on the surface, is that the capitalists do not do the producing but the workers. But this is an illusion. Renault, for example, is not in any sense the "product" of the workers employed at Renault; it's the product of generations of people (not merely in France) including miners, machine producers, food producers, researchers, engineers. To think that the Renault auto plants "belong" to the people who work there today is an illusion. Yet this was the fiction accepted by people who had rejected specialization and "property" in the occupied universities.

The "revolutionaries," who had transformed universities into public places and consequently no one's property, were not aware of the SOCIAL character of the factories. What they contested was the "subject" who controlled the property, the "owner." The conception of the "revolutionaries" was that "Renault workers should run the factories instead of the state bureaucrats; Citroën workers should run Citroën instead of the capitalist owners." In other words, private and state property are to be transformed to group property: Citroën is to become the property of the workers employed at Citroën. And since this "corporation" of workers does not exist in a

demonstrations and street fights as an occasion for raising new material demands. However, the "intellectuals" at Censier tended to amalgamate all workers into the same "class"; they failed to distinguish those who were there to reform capitalist life from those who intended to abolish capitalism, and as a result they were unable to focus on the specific character of the actions proposed by the radical workers.

For example, young workers from a private printing school announced that they had thrown out their director, were about to occupy the school, and wanted to put the presses at the disposal of the people gathered at Censier. However, Censier "militants" were not as radical as these workers; "illegally" occupying a university building, they questioned the "legality" of the action proposed by the young workers (who might have done better to propose this action to members of the March 22 Movement). Another example: two or three workers came from the newspaper distribution enterprise of Paris. They called on Censier militants to join them in stopping the distribution of newspapers; they called on the people gathered at Censier to explain to workers at their enterprise what was taking place in the universities.

The militants who listened to these suggestions did not react as if they themselves were active agents who could transform a social situation in a real factory by going there in person. (One of the writers of this article was present at a discussion which took place before May 10 between a militant of the March 22 Movement (Dany Cohn-Bendit) and some of the people who later influenced the development of occupied Censier. It was clear that the future Censier occupants did not define themselves the same way Dany defined himself; Dany regarded his own activity as a dynamic force which could transform the social situation; but they asked about the "support" Dany had, about the "masses behind" him. Their conception was that, somehow, the "masses" were going to rise and act, and that the militants would be able to define their roles only within the

these things about. If "someone" would do that, then there would be self-defense, escalation, and so on. Our "perspectives" were based on events that had not, in fact, taken place. Somehow "the workers" were to realize these perspectives themselves, even though the people who had the perspectives were not inside the factories. The action committee people did not go into the factory to call for the formation of a general assembly of all those present, the way they had done at Censier. They told the workers to do it. And there were no significant elements among the workers to do that. If one or another group of workers had formed such a general assembly, it would have meant that these workers were more "radical" than the Censier militants, who were unable to translate words into actions. But a factory-full of workers who were more "radical" than the people in Censier would obviously have provided the basis for large perspectives. If a group of workers had invited the population to use the technology freely, to take the cars and machines home, this action would clearly have led to various types of "escalation." Such workers would also have confronted other workers' sheepishness.

The militants who gathered at Censier expected action to come from a mythologically conceived "mass" which has its own perspectives and which acts. This dependence on external action can be situated at the very origin of the formation of the worker-student action committees at Censier. Already on May 6, young workers and intellectuals who fought together on the barricades began discussions. These groups of students and workers continued the discussions when they occupied Censier on May 11, in the general assemblies and in smaller groups. It was in these early assemblies that the "militants" at Censier confronted radical actions proposed by workers.

A large number of workers were among the occupants of Censier. Many of these workers understood that the continuity of capitalist daily life had been broken, a rupture had taken place, the regularities of life were suspended; consequently they understood that new activities were possible. Other workers saw the student

vacuum, it has to establish machinery to relate to other, "external" corporations of workers. Consequently they have to set up an administration, a bureaucracy, which "represents" the workers of a particular plant. One element of this corporatist conception was affected by the "model" of the occupied universities. Just as the student union was rejected as the "spokesman" for the university occupants, the traditional union (the General Confederation of Labor) was rejected as the "spokesman" for the incorporated workers: "the workers should not be represented by the CGT; they should be represented by themselves," namely by a new, democratically elected bureaucracy.

Thus even in the perspectives of the university occupants, the factories were not to be socialized. Thus "General Assemblies" inside the factories did not have the same meaning as in the universities. The factories were to become group property, like Yugoslav enterprises. Such enterprises are not socially controlled; they are run by bureaucracies inside each enterprise.

By fighting the Gaullist police in the streets, people contested the legitimacy of this power over their lives. By occupying a building like Censier, they contested the legitimacy of the bureaucrats who controlled this "public institution." People occupied Censier whether or not they had ever been students there; no one acted as if Censier "belonged" to those students who were enrolled for courses there. But the same logic was not applied to the factories. People did not go to Renault or Citroën saying, "This doesn't belong to the capitalist, or to the state, and it doesn't belong to the CGT either ! Furthermore it doesn't belong to a new bureaucracy that someone might set up. It belongs to the people, which includes us. Renault is ours. And we're going in. First of all we want to see what it is, and then we'll figure out what to do with it."

In May it was certainly possible for ten thousand people to go to Renault and occupy it. More than ten thousand did in fact demonstrate their "solidarity" with the workers of Renault, and they walked from the center of Paris to the Renault plant at Bil-

lancourt. But the dominant idea was that the workers who are employed there have to decide what happens inside the factory. The demonstrators accepted the most important regularity of capitalist life: they accepted property, they merely wanted a new owner.

(A small number of workers from a chemical plant did go to Censier to invite "outsiders" into the factory, but their invitation did not have consequences, and was even opposed by "revolutionary" arguments like "We would be substituting ourselves for the workers.")

The idea that "the means of production belong to the working people" was translated to mean that the workers own the particular factory they work in. This is an extreme vulgarization. Such an interpretation would mean that the particular activity to which the wage struggle condemned someone in capitalist society is the activity to which they will be condemned when the society is transformed. What if someone who works in the auto plant wants to paint, farm, fly or do research rather than assembly line car production? A revolution would mean that workers, at that moment, would go all over the society, and it is doubtful that many of them would return to the particular car factory that capitalism had condemned them to work in.

The "idea" of workers' councils does not necessarily imply that workers will be tied to a particular factory for life, in the sense that the workers "belong" to the factory that "belongs" to them. What the "idea" suggests is that all the workers will rule social production. However, in May and June there were no actions in this direction; the statements addressed to workers explicitly said: "Workers, form general assemblies in YOUR factories; form workers' councils in YOUR factories," which is an automatic transplantation of the Yugoslav model.

The student movement was impregnated with historical examples of "workers' councils" in Russia, Germany, Spain, Hungary and Yugoslavia. A tactic by which workers in one factory can effectively oppose the factory bureaucracy was transformed into a

jected the self-organization of the universities to the factories, but they projected corporatist rather than social self-organization. This corporatist self-organization in the factories appealed to two types: it appealed to anti-communists and liberals, and it appealed to anarchist-communists. To the anti-communists, self-organization in each factory meant that workers would organize a separate union in each factory and get out of the CGT. The "radicals" made no clear attacks on this perspective, and it is precisely because of this that they had even less appeal for workers than the bureaucrats of the CGT. Workers are obviously much stronger with the CGT than they would be with separate unions in each factory. Members of the CGT were in fact sensible to reject a perspective which promised little more than fragmentation within capitalist society. The "autonomous" workers' organizations would replace the national union in the task of selling the labor force, namely of bargaining with the capitalist or state owners, and they would obviously have less strength in doing this than a national union.

What, then, was the "action" of the action committees after the outbreak of the strike? They "kept something going." They "continued the struggle." Militants spent time and energy. Why? Was it simply that no one had anything to do, friends came to see friends, "intellectuals" came to "talk to workers"? The Citroën Committee, for example, continued to meet every day. Some days were spent discussing an article written by two members; another day a worker wrote a reformist leaflet; on another occasion there was a fight with fascists in front of the factory. People were certainly kept busy. But did they move in some direction? Did they have a strategy, perspectives?

Some of us did have perspectives. But we were unable to define actions which led from where we were to where we wanted to get. We called for a "general assembly of the workers," for "defense of the factories by the workers." But it was not our actions that were to lead to, or provoke, these events. There was an expectation (or a hope) that someone else, somewhere else, would bring

Self-Organization in Action Committees

What type of consciousness led action committee militants to this reformist strategy?

Characterized in very general terms, it is a consciousness which simply accepts the vast majority of the regularities and conventions of capitalist everyday life; a consciousness which accepts bureaucratic organization, private property, the representation of workers through unions, the separation of workers in terms of particular tasks and locations in society. In short, it is a consciousness which accepts capitalist society. It is within this framework that the militants "move around." They "take actions," but do not even apply outside of Censier what they are already doing inside of Censier. Self-organized in Censier, they still accept capitalist society. (A minor example of this is that "revolutionaries" who think they are struggling to abolish capitalist society once and for all, do not use last names because they fear the repression that will come once "stability" is restored.) They want to participate in whatever actions take place: they support workers striking for higher wages, they support workers demanding more "rights" for union bureaucrats, they support people striking for an "autonomous national radio station," even though this conflicts with other "ideas" they hold.

There were, of course, several types of action committees: some were as reformist as the Communist Party and the union; others tried to define a "revolutionary strategy" by passing through reformist "transitional steps." Some action committee militants pro-

"revolutionary program." The "workers' councils" were to be created inside the factories by the workers themselves, the same way that the occupations had been carried out by the students.

However, what happened on May 15 was that a "wildcat strike" broke out, namely an event which is within the bounds of activity that takes place in capitalist society. The wildcat strike degenerated into a bureaucratic strike because of the failure of the revolutionary movement to "escalate" or overflow into the factories. The militants did not have perspectives for passing from a wildcat strike, from a rebellion against authority, to the liberation of daily life. In a few days the strike was taken over by the union bureaucracy, and in this sense was not even a successful wildcat strike. This missing step between the student struggle and the general strike effectively closed this route of escalation: the student movement did not "escalate" into a movement within the factories.

Perhaps, after the outbreak of the strike, there still remained possibilities for escalation, possibilities for a further step in the direction of transforming daily life. People were still fighting. With ten million workers on strike and thousands of people on the streets every day, the escalation might have taken the form of a systematic attempt to destroy the state apparatus. The orientation of the movement was anti-statist; the state ran the universities and its power had been abolished. There had been an "escalation" until May 10. Students communicated their intentions to other students in the street. And their intentions were very specific. On May 10 they were determined to take back their university. They had the support of the majority of students, of young workers who joined them in the street, and of the people in the neighborhood (the Latin Quarter). However, after May 10, a series of small demonstrations "reproduce" the demonstration and struggle of May 10, and no longer constitute "escalations" of the struggle. Thousands of people participate in these actions; there are constant confrontations with the police. But there is no longer the determination to take control over an essential activity.

For example, the state power, which did not dare send its army or police anywhere between May 16 and May 20, was using a small group of cops to broadcast the news all over France. The state broadcast its "news" from a tower with a few cops in front of it, and everyone in France knew that lies were being broadcast (for example, that workers were striking for their union demands, and that students were anxious to take their tests).

The people in the universities and in the streets, as well as the striking workers, really needed to communicate with the rest of the population, merely to describe what they had done and were doing. Yet in this situation, where the "relation of forces" was on the side of the population and not the state (in the view of both sides), when "revolutionaries" thought they had already won and the government thought it had already gone under — in this situation, between May 16 and May 20, all that happened about the lack of information was that people whispered about it in the street, and some vaguely said "we should take over the national radio station."

On May 22, a group of mini-bureaucrats who saw their chance to organize "The Revolutionary Party," called "official delegates" of all action committees to a meeting which was to plan the next "grand" demonstration. The nature of the demonstration had, in fact, been planned before the meeting took place; the delegates were gathered together to help the bureaucrats think up "slogans". And what had been decided was that, on May 24, another show of force was to take place, in front of a railroad station; it had also been decided that the only difference between this demonstration and earlier ones would be the slogans. But there was no longer a need to show those in power that "we are strong." In other words, this was not to be a transformation of reality, of the activities of daily life; it was to be a transformation of slogans (namely words, and ultimately, if the words "caught on," then the ideas in people's heads would be transformed). The mini-bureaucrats decided not to engage in anything so adventuristic as the occupation of the radio station by sections of the population who were fed up with the ide-

necessary to offend the workers by attacking their union, which they accept." However, the same logic could have been extended to the proposition, "We should not offend the workers by attacking capitalist society, which they also accept."

This was a reformist strategy without any real elements that went beyond reformism. This strategy was nothing more than support for a wildcat strike, and when the strike was taken over by the union, the committee militants supported a traditional, bureaucratic union strike.

say anything relevant to the general assembly, but precisely because the militants ceased having anything to say that there were bureaucrats.

The Citroën Action Committee was one of the groups that ceased to have any relevant actions to present to the general assembly at Censier. This committee, like the others, was not able to engage in action which was transparently liberatory for all the people gathered in the assembly. The Committee described "contacts" with foreign workers, attempts to create places for unhampered discussions inside the factories, attempts to encourage workers to take factory trucks to collect food which peasants were willing to distribute freely. However, the Citroën Committee people did not, for example, go to the factory saying, "We know where there's food, and we need some of the trucks inside," and they did not propose to the general assembly, "We're going inside the factory to take the trucks, and we need fifty people to help us."

Yet the Citroën Committee continued to exist, and to "function." What did we actually do during the month after the outbreak of the strike, and what did we think we were doing? Did we engage in so much motion because we "liked the workers"?

Part of the reason we went to the factories was that we considered ourselves as simply so much physical force which could help the workers take over the factories. However, the initiative in this case was left "to the workers," and since the workers had not liberated themselves from the union bureaucracy, the initiative was left to the union bureaucrats. Consequently, as a "physical force," the action committee militants went to the factory gates to help the CGT. The first leaflets of the Citroën Committee in fact confirm this: "Workers, we support your political and union rights… your demands… Long live political and union liberties." These statements can only have one meaning in a situation where there is one dominant union: they could only mean Long Live the CGT, whatever the illusions of the people who wrote the leaflets. The logic behind these propositions went approximately as follows: "It's not

ological repression of the radio. "We'll be outmanned and we'll be shot" reasoned the mini-bureaucrats, who were so used to thinking in terms of "revolutionary groups" of twenty or less members confronting the whole police of France that they thought the same way in May. The other "idea" was: "We can't protect all those people from the police," an idea which unveils the way these "leaders" think of "their sheep." The only activity that interested the mini-bureaucrats was to police demonstrators by appointing themselves to the "service of order," keeping people on the sidewalks, or on the streets, telling demonstrators what to do, dispersing them. So that this route to potential escalation was closed on May 24.

Self Organization in General Assemblies

The general assemblies functioned, at the Sorbonne and at Censier, only when the occupants of the building met to plan a new action, only when they met to organize their own practical activities. If a concrete action was not proposed, the general assembly tended to deteriorate.

At the Sorbonne, for example, the interventions of the March 22 Movement were very important. The militants of M 22 announced what they intended to do, and the people gathered at the general assembly planned their own actions with the knowledge that a concrete action would take place on a specific day. The M 22 militants did not appoint themselves (or get themselves elected) as bureaucrats or spokesmen of the general assemblies; they continued the struggle to liberate themselves, and refused to recognize anyone's right to define or limit the terms of their liberation, whether it was a state bureaucracy or a "revolutionary" bureaucracy consisting of elected "representatives" of a general assembly. When they abdicated this freedom, when M 22 militants allowed the self-appointed presidents of a general assembly to define their action, as in the planning sessions for the May 24 demonstration, the result was not anyone's liberation, but rather the constraint of the entire movement.

March 22 militants were not the only people who confronted general assemblies with the choice of joining or opposing actions. Individuals assumed the right to interrupt general assembly discussions in order to describe actions they were engaged in, to seek

support, and to confront passive "sympathizers" and "revolutionary spectators" with the challenge: "What are you actually DOING to liberate yourself?"

This right to intervene, which was granted fairly universally, was frequently abused. All types and varieties of small actionettes were described at general assemblies, not merely actions which were significant and possible in terms of the changed situation and the social power of the people ready to act.

When there were no collective actions which were significant as transformations of the social situation, the general assemblies lost their character of self-organized activity, and frequently degenerated into audiences of spectators bored by the machinations of the bureaucrats up front. This degeneration was frequently explained as a structural shortcoming of the general assemblies; the action committees were supposedly more effective structures. However, the action committees were integral parts of the general assembly. The general assembly, a large body of people, did not itself perform actions: the actions were carried out by smaller groups of people who organized and planned the projects which had been chosen and defined by the assembly. The action committees did not represent a new "social structure" which was to be the "form of future society." The second function of the action committees was to make possible direct communication, development of ideas and perspectives, definition of concrete tasks, which would not have been possible among the larger body of people. However, when the action committees became "institutionalized," when they no longer situated their activity within the context of the general assembly which gave rise to them, when committee members began to think of their committee as an institution, as a *thing* whose significance was explained in terms of a mysterious "revolutionary movement," the activity of the committees lost its context. Consequently, the degeneration of the general assemblies was in fact merely a reflection of the degeneration of the action committees: it's not because there were bureaucrats that action committee militants couldn't