

Art for the French Working Class

One of the more remarkable sights in Paris during the May-June events of 1968 was the numerous posters pasted on the walls throughout the city. These professional looking posters, carrying barbed political slogans, were imaginatively and artfully illustrated and had a great political impact on the striking workers and students in France.

The posters were created and produced by a group of students, artists and workers who called themselves l'Atelier Populaire, the People's Art Studio. During the struggle, they occupied the art studios of the Beaux Arts School in Paris and between May 14 and June 27, created 350 different posters. After the height of the struggle was over and everything returned to "normal," the militants of the People's Art Studio wrote and published by themselves, a small book entitled "Atelier Populaire" which contains reprints of 87 posters and a text collectively written which explains their political position.

What follows below is a selection from the collection of posters and excerpts from the text of this book.

PLATFORM OF THE STRIKING STUDENTS OF THE BEAUX ARTS SCHOOL

Wednesday, May 15, 1968, 12 noon.

Why do we continue the struggle? Against whom are we struggling? We are struggling against a university based on class. We intend to organize the struggle against all these aspects:

1. We are against the selection of students on a class basis which occurs throughout the entire educational system, from primary to high school, to the detriment of the children of the working and peasant classes. We intend to struggle against the system of tests and competitive examinations which is the main method of class selection.

2. We are against the content of education and the methods used to teach it. Everything is organized so that the products of the educational system do not acquire a critical awareness as well as an understanding of social and economic reality.

3. We are against the role that society expects intellectuals to play: to be the watch dogs of the capitalist system, to be the technocrats, to make sure that everyone knows his place, particularly when "everyone" is in an exploited position.

In short, we intend to expose the real connections between school and society; we intend to struggle against its class character.

We must be aware of the fact that we cannot conduct this struggle by ourselves. We must not fall into the trap and believe that the universities will be able to become truly independent of bourgeois society. The universities must

struggle on the side of the workers who are the main victims of class selection which operates in the educational system. The struggle against the class university must be organically tied to the struggle of all the workers against the system of capitalist exploitation.

THE STRIKE COMMITTEE

HISTORY AND POLITICS OF THE PEOPLE'S ART STUDIO

Since May 14, some students have met on their own accord in the lithography studio and, taking part in direct action, designed the first poster:



Factory-University-Union

May 16, in the course of a meeting of the reform committee set up that morning, a number of participants, students and painters from the outside, decided to occupy the painting studios, thereby directly putting in practice the program of struggle drawn up on May 15. They wrote on the door:

PEOPLE'S ART STUDIO: YES
BOURGEOIS ART STUDIO: NO

On this basis, we put ourselves to work. We began by producing some posters and at the same time, in the following leaflet, we set forth our position opposing the proceedings of the reform committee:

PEOPLE'S ART SCHOOL: YES
BOURGEOIS ART SCHOOL: NO

When we try to explain the slogan we have written on the door of the studio and understand what it means, we plainly see the essential lines of our new action.

This slogan means that it is not a question of modernizing, i.e., improving what already exists. All reforms basically mean that the general line is not changed and that what existed before was good. We are opposed to what prevails today. What prevails today? Bourgeois art and bourgeois culture.

What is bourgeois culture? It is the instrument through which the ruling class' power of oppression separates and isolates the artists from the rest of the workers by giving them a privileged status. This privilege confines the artist in an invisible prison. The fundamental concepts which support this isolation are:

--- The idea that art has "won its independence."

--- The protection of "freedom of creation." Bourgeois culture gives the artist the illusion that he is free:

1. He does what he wants, he believes everything is possible, he is accountable only to himself or to his art.

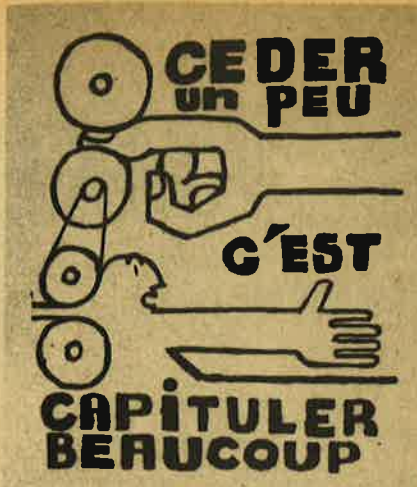
2. He is a "creator," that is, he invents something entirely unique with a permanent value above and apart from historical reality. He is not a worker at grips with historical reality.

By giving him this privileged status, culture places the artist out of harm's way where he functions as a safety valve in the mechanism of bourgeois society.

This situation applies to all of us. We are all bourgeois artists. How could it be otherwise?



Workers! French + Immigrant Unite!



To Yield A Little Is To Surrender A Lot

That is why, at the time we are writing "People's Art Studio," it cannot be a matter of reform but of a change in a radical direction.

This means that we have decided to change our function in society.

There are ten million strikers in France. Those active in the People's Art Studio go to the occupied factories, depots and yards in order to learn from the striking workers how they can work in the rear of the struggle in which the workers are the vanguard.

It is not a laboratory experiment: everyone, worker or student, foreigner or Frenchman, comes to join in the enthusiasm of producing the posters. Some workers come to propose slogans, to hold discussions with the artists and students, to criticize the finished posters, or to distribute them outside.

At the entrance of the art studio is the message: "To work in the People's Art Studio is to concretely support the great movement of the striking workers who are occupying the factories against the anti-working class Gaullist government. By placing all his skills in the service of the workers' struggle, everyone in the art studio also works for himself because he opens his mind, through practice, to the educational power of the masses."

The progressive students and artists, by placing themselves concretely in the service of the working class struggle, go to its school and change their point of view by tying themselves to the masses. They continuously try through action, criticism and self-criticism, to eliminate the practice of individualistic bourgeois creation which, consciously or not, always reemerges.

How do we work?

The poster projects, planned jointly after a political analysis of the day's events or after discussions at the door of the factories, are democratically proposed at the end of the day in a general assembly. This is how we judge:



The Boss Needs You, You Don't Need Him

- Is the political idea correct?
- Does the poster communicate this idea?

Then the accepted projects are silk screened and lithographed by teams working in shifts throughout the day and night.

Dozens of teams are formed to paste up the posters. They are joined by people from district action committees and strike committees of the occupied factories, each one telling of his experiences. More and more, different sectors of the working class spread the just ideas of the workers by means of these posters.

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION

The People's Art Studio is made up of one studio in which the posters are designed and several studios where they are produced.

A General Assembly of all the militants of the People's Art Studio meets daily. The work of the General Assembly consists of choosing projects and slogans and also discussing all the current political problems. It is mainly in the course of these discussions that the political line of the People's Art Studio is worked out and takes shape. It is essential to us to have the participation of the greatest possible number of workers at the General Assembly.

The procedure adopted for passing on a project in the General Assembly is one we discovered through the daily experience of direct democracy; everyone submits himself to the criticism of all; each one takes account of it and corrects his work based on this criticism.

Our experience shows us that the dangers to avoid are:

- the loss of time in useless discussion due to bad organization of the day's work.
- a large amount of vague slogans.
- voting on projects too quickly.

These dangers result in useless work and people drifting away from us.

It seemed to us that the best remedy was the formation of the committee, subject to re-

moval, which proposes a series of topics and precise slogans at the General Assembly, and which mobilizes the work teams. This avoids wasteful and unwarranted projects. This does not mean to prohibit new comrades from working with slogans which were not previously discussed and accepted.

All responsibility is provisional and rotates according to needs and enthusiasm. Discussion on the choice of topics for posters and slogans helps the People's Art Studio to develop its political line. This work is the essential motive for action.

How are the slogans devised? Where do they come from? From the struggles of the workers, both striking and non-striking. It is necessary to be as one with them in every instant of their real suffering and with the realities of their struggles. This is the way to draw up straightforward concrete slogans. This is how we produce posters which will effectively support the struggles of the people.

Our experience has shown us the danger of ambiguity and the need to interpret the slogans in graphic art. Sincerity, fantasy and imagination are only effective in so far as they interpret and strengthen the meaning of the slogans.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

The experiences of the May movement are irreversible and will have far greater value than all the ephemeral victories of the capitalists—victories obtained by blackmail and demagoguery.

The People's Art Studio has not fallen into parliamentary cretinism. The fight continues. We have entered on a course of prolonged struggle. The struggle will not be carried on in the voting booths but in the factories—on the battlefields. Today, as at the height of the May movement, the question which remains is that of the POWER OF THE PEOPLE.

Therefore, the People's Art Studio in the service of the workers must:



**LUNION DE TOUS
LES TRAVAILLEURS
BRISERA LES FRONTIERES**

The Union of All Workers Will Break Down the Frontiers

--- show all the forms that capitalist oppression takes today under the authoritarian Gaullist regime (repression by the bosses and the cops).

--- sustain the resoluteness of the workers and students—develop and carry out their struggle.

We will help them through our work of popularization, in the factories, yards, depots, offices, and in the universities, schools, and colleges, to make the class struggle triumph over class collaboration. Class collaboration is the road chosen by the leaders of the P.C.F.¹ and the C.G.T.² which sees electoral struggle as the principal way to win people's power.

We will denounce bourgeois culture through our work. Secreted under the control of a class, it is in the service of this class. Culture is part of the system of oppression and is used by the ruling class against the people.

If we agree to spread bourgeois culture, we

will not help in the development of people's culture; therefore, we must fight against the system of cultural participation proposed by Malraux, the Minister of Culture. No more than the workers in their factories will agree to participate in their exploitation, can we agree to participate in the oppressive distribution of bourgeois culture. In order to help the development of a real people's culture, i.e., from the people and in the service of people, we must push for the creation of more People's Art Studios.

FOOTNOTE

¹ P.C.F. - the revisionist Communist Party of France.

C.G.T. - controlled and led by the revisionists, it is the central trade union in France similar to the A.F.L.-C.I.O. in the U.S.

Participate In What?

The French ruling class has banned the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of France and its newspaper I'Humanite Nouvelle. The following article appeared in the February 27, 1969 issue of a new weekly newspaper I'Humanite Rouge whose banner reads "A Weekly Publication of Marxist-Leninist Information and Studies in the Service of the Workers, Peasants and Intellectuals." The article, written by an unnamed worker, was inspired by a poster which originally appeared during the May-June events of 1968 and was a product of the People's Art Studio. The poster was reprinted alongside the article as it appears below.



Couve de Murville¹ said in his last speech: "Participation is the opposite of protest." Protest is the power to say no, participation is to say yes eternally. Under capitalist rule, the workers' lot is to be always exploited; to ask the workers to participate is to ask them to agree to their exploitation, to give up the right to struggle against capitalism.

WHEN THE BOSS ASKS A WORKER TO PARTICIPATE, IT IS THE SAME AS IF THE HANGMAN WOULD ASK THE CONDEMNED PRISONER TO PARTICIPATE IN HIS OWN EXECUTION.

To this the boss hurls back: "When you participate in a game, you do not challenge the rule."

That is so, but you forget, Mr. Boss, that the working class has no intention of playing the game of hangman and victim with you. We agree to struggle, but with equal weapons, which means, not by your rules.

What is your rule?

Footnote:

¹ Couve de Merville is Premier of France.

That's simple. "For the bosses, all shots are allowed."

You have the right to steal from us every day by paying us far below the value of our work.

You have the right to kill us in work accidents.

You have the right to use violence against us: your foremen who bully us every day, your cops and your army who butcher us if we rebel.

You have the right to call a truce when the game no longer interests you; the right to lay off workers when the factory is slow; the right to shut down completely; even the right to keep us unemployed, to starve us, etc.

If we play with you, we will take our rights.

The right to have our own army made up of workers and peasants.

The right to strike; the right to fight against unemployment, low salaries, the right to take power.

Our workers' power, without unemployment, without miserable salaries, the power of workers without foremen.

But, you know very well that in this battle, you will be the loser.

No, really, do not count on us to participate in exploitation and get ready to defend your position.

Because we have decided to organize ourselves to participate in the struggle for power.



For Education in the Service of the People
NO TO THE (BOURGEOIS) CLASS UNIVERSITY

SUHARTO AUCTIONS....

(continued from p.43)

Bahar, of August 12, ASEAN (Thailand, "Malaysia", "Singapore", the Philippines and Indonesia) has formed a "defence liaison group" each member of which is charged with matters relating to military bases in the respective countries. The paper said that this was a step closer to the formation of a military pact. The paper further reported, that ASEAN military bases were being set up on the island of Sabang, off the northern tip of Sumatra, which was intended to have a military operational link with Thailand, at Bitung in northern Sulawesi, which would have a military operational connection with the U.S. military bases in

the Philippines, and at Chilachap, on the south coast of Java, which would serve as a base, linking the country with Australia. The cross-road position of Indonesia is strategically important in this part of the world, the paper added.

The Suharto-Nasution fascist regime has converted Indonesia into a complete new-type colony, in accordance with the U.S. strategic plan in Southeast Asia.

The Indonesian people have no freedom, politically; no freedom, economically; no freedom, socially. They have no freedom to defend their own rights and interests.

For them there is no other alternative than to wage an armed struggle to overthrow the traitorous, fascist military regime.

"However much the reactionaries try to hold back the wheel of history, sooner or later revolution will take place and will inevitably triumph."

"The enemy will not perish of himself."

"Everything reactionary is the same; if you don't hit it, it won't fall."

"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

— Chairman Mao Tse-tung