

THE
REVOLUTIONARY STORM
IN FRANCE

A REPORT AND ANALYSIS

BY THE

WORKING PEOPLE'S PARTY OF ENGLAND

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A report and analysis

For three days, from Monday, May 27th, when the workers at Renault-Billancourt rejected by acclamation the terms proposed through the CGT by Prime Minister Pompidou, until the following Thursday, when de Gaulle made his second broadcast of the crisis, the whole of Paris, and pretty certainly most of France, considered the Gaullist regime to be already dead and were discussing only the who and how of the succession.

The students and young workers had inflicted a military defeat on the forces that the Government then had available in Paris, the CRS, thugs whose brutalities have been sufficiently described throughout the British press:

With the whole civil transport and communications system completely paralysed, with the great majority of factories occupied by their workers, strike action by now of a completely political type rapidly spreading and including not only the big shops and banks, but also increasingly the Government service itself and with no support for the Government from anyone with a public voice, it would for those few days have been impossible for the Government to resist a decisive call for a seizure of power by a recognised national leadership. Everyone in fact expected it. It is only necessary to go through the Paris press published on the Thursday morning to confirm this.

It has been reported that the PSU, the Left bourgeois party led by Mendes-France, had in fact prepared such a revolutionary manifesto, but that Mendes then hesitated to launch this declaration. If he had done so, it is possible that the French revisionist Communist Party might have been unable to withhold support just as it had been unable to prevent first the student action and then in turn the sit-in strike and finally the rejection of its political surrender to Pompidou by means of its negotiated wage increase for Renault who were in this crisis acting and speaking for the whole French working class, organised and unorganised. Compare the Putilov works in Petrograd in 1917.

By Thursday de Gaulle had reorganised his forces, had arranged to mobilise the army and was able to resume the initiative, as decisive in a political crisis as in military warfare. Whereas on Wednesday the workers of Paris had complete command of the streets with not a policeman or a CRS to be seen, on the Thursday it was possible for the reactionaries to stage a mass demonstration in the Paris West-end in thankful enthusiasm at being saved by the tanks of Massu, the torturer of Algiers. The very suggestion of such a counter-revolutionary street demonstration at any time in the previous four days would have been impossible to make because impossible to carry through. The people would not have stood for it.

For ten years, since his seizure of power by a military coup in 1958, Gaullist paternalism had been successfully able to maintain reaction in command, while a considerable measure of capitalist economic development took place just as it did in Britain under the Tories.

No one in France wanted a return of the Fourth Republic that de Gaulle had abolished, just as today in Britain, in spite of appearances, such support as there is for the Tories is largely disgust at what the Labour Party has finally shown itself to be.

De Gaulle himself seems to have taken little interest in internal economic development, though he found able men to steer French capitalism in such persons as Debre and Pompidou.

The most positive feature of the Gaullist regime was its foreign policy. He recognised socialist and revolutionary China, and he opposed to a carefully calculated degree only, but still in practice to a decisive extent, the brutal devouring imperialism of the US. In particular, he was openly critical of their war in Vietnam and he took practical steps to limit their export of dollar inflation. To this extent, the regime of de Gaulle in France, e.g. in contrast to Franco in Spain, was not entirely reactionary.

Just as in the China of 1919 after the end of the First World War, so in the France of 1968 it was the students who first effectively reacted against the tyranny. There are various reasons for this, as there were in China. But unquestionably one large factor in France has been the new China and its cultural revolution of the past two years. (The rash of hand posters not only all over the Sorbonne and the Beaux-Arts, but also over much of Paris, and the occupation by students and staff of all the secondary schools in Paris and also very many all over France have surely been directly inspired by the actions of the Chinese students and young scholars.)

The leadership of the student movement was mainly of two types, both claiming descent from Marx. (There was also, as in Britain, some anarchist influence with much surface effect, but this was in Paris, as in London, in reality on a considerably smaller scale than that of those claiming to be Marxists.)

To judge by the Sorbonne - probably as representative for the students as Renault for the workers - the predominant leadership was that of the JCR (Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionaire). Many JCRs repudiate the label of Trotskyist, they mostly take Guevara for their hero and seek to identify with the "Third World".

The Marxist-Leninist influence among the students has been that of two groups organisationally separate but now working amicably together, the newly-founded French Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) and the group of students and young workers who used the title of their paper "Servir le Peuple" (Serve the People). Both these organ-

isations fully support contemporary Marxism-Leninism headed internationally by Mao Tse Tung. Both supported the student movement from its inception, not merely unreservedly but most actively, partly or largely working in industry, in particular at Renault. The French Marxist-Leninists have certainly been an important part of the student movement and probably played a decisive part in the development of the sit-in strikes, which it must never be forgotten were not called either by the CGT or CP, but were what in this country would be called unofficial, started by the workers themselves.

Relations between JCR and the Marxist-Leninist students were obviously good, both engaged jointly in the arduous practical tasks of revolution, both in the streets and in their faculties (colleges). The attitude of the strictly Marxist-Leninist new revolutionary Communist Party was stated to our delegate by a Party representative in these terms: "To denounce Trotskyism as such in the actual situation in France (this was 31.5.68) would be to play the game for the reactionaries."

Trotskyism was described by Stalin as "a petty bourgeois revolutionary trend which for a certain stage was in alliance with the revolutionary working class movement". Marxist-Leninists must not forget that Trotsky himself played for some eight months (1917-18) an active and useful revolutionary role. It seems that the Trotskyist movement among the students of the present day, which takes Guevara for its hero and is much influenced by the Cuban revolution, has also been playing a positive revolutionary role in helping to mobilise students for revolutionary action in a period when Communists have been emerging with difficulty from the mortuary of revisionism embodied in this country by the CPGB.

Just as in Russia, from the time when Trotsky refused to support the correct policy of Lenin and to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the influence of Trotsky ceased to be useful to the revolution and became harmful and dangerous, so all who have understood that socialism is impossible without revolution and that humanity cannot develop further without socialism must now understand that any political current that in fact divides instead of uniting the socialist movement is harmful and dangerous.

The basic Leninist tactical revolutionary precept that has been universalised by Mao Tse Tung is that we must ALWAYS UNITE ALL THOSE WHO CAN BE UNITED AGAINST THE MAIN ENEMY. All those who struggle for socialism as their goal and revolution through change of class power as their means must, if they want to win, have one party, one organisation - not two or three.

The hold which the revisionist Communist Party still has over the working people of France has succeeded in temporarily stopping the development of a revolution which had astounded the world by its progress. What are the prospects now?

French capitalism continues to face the same increasingly acute economic crisis as it did in the revolutionary month of May. The new Pompidou Government is in the same basic situation as its predecessor, or as any new capitalistic government of Mitterand or Mendes-France, or Waldeck-Rochet for that matter, would have been in, had they succeeded in their attempt to divert the revolutionary situation created by others into putting these old Parliamentary hacks into office. Power would still have been with the financiers, with Massu and his tanks ready to back the CRS. This is thoroughly understood by both revolutionary workers and revolutionary students.

Only a government with a socialist policy would be able to break through this economic crisis of capitalism and so not need to cut wages. Only a socialist policy can increase production, only a socialist policy can break right through the bankers' law of maximum profits to capital and substitute the human law of maximum benefit to mankind. A government with such a policy is only possible on the basis of workers' power.

That is why the French revolution will certainly continue.

Neither the capitalists nor the working people have any choice. The capitalists will back de Gaulle as long as he can maintain himself. The working people, if they want anything different, can only obtain it by resuming the revolution they started in May. But this resumption will need a new revolutionary leadership.

The revolutionary students and young workers achieved marvels. To have the whole education system in France "in occupation" by the students, 8 to 10 millions of workers "occupying" factories, railways, shops and government offices - all this is not a small achievement, not a minor display of the power of the people when they unite against their class oppressors.

But to consolidate victory in this violent eruption of the class war, the working people would have needed the leadership of their own nationally recognised revolutionary party. This is why the CGT will either be brought under socialist leadership or a new socialist factory leadership will develop to replace it (c.f. the shop stewards here in Britain). This is why revolutionary students and workers - they will be mostly young workers - will have to unite in a single revolutionary Party. Without revolution we cannot have socialism. Non-revolutionary socialism is either an illusion or a deception.

FRANCE IN 1968 HAS REMINDED THE WORLD HOW THE WORKING PEOPLE OF A WHOLE NATION ARE READY FOR JUST SUCH A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION.

But without a revolutionary party can we have a successful revolution? Lenin and Mao have said "If there is to be a revolution there must be a revolutionary party".

It is just now fashionable among the bourgeois Left to make a great display of the fact that Cuba started its successful revolt against Batista without, or rather against, a Communist party that professed to be revolutionary.

In fact, the old CP of Cuba, typical in this of all the revisionist Communist Parties under CPSU influence, was as anti-revolutionary as the French CP today, or the CPGB. But was not the fighting organisation that Castro led in the Sierra Maestra also in fact a fighting revolutionary party? Could it have won its war without political organisation and discipline of the Leninist type? Does anyone suggest that Cuba today could continue to develop its revolution without its new Communist Party? The name is not the essential any more than it is in Vietnam. The essential is correct policy, correct organisation.

Can anyone doubt that a revolutionary party of the working class in France with sufficient roots and influence in the factories could have achieved the seizure of power in the first half of the last week in May?

The French people and all of us will pay a heavy price for not having had that decisive nationally recognised revolutionary Party developed to adequate strength and ready at that critical time.

The French working class will now certainly take to themselves such a leadership, and will do this in conjunction with the energetic, devoted, courageous, revolutionary students who have shown themselves by their actions to be a splendid part of the revolutionary workers.

The working class revolution in France which failed in 1936 and failed again under the same revisionist leadership in 1945-7 has now taken a decisive step forward which will leave a greater residue of achievement than either of the two previous failures. We can be confident that revolutionary leadership in France will not only continue to grow but will develop rapidly.

France in these weeks provided a series of surprises, even for the most clear-sighted.

First, the student revolt foreseeable only in general terms, not in the speed of its development.

Then the development of the sit-in strikes against the wishes of the official trade unions and revisionist Communist apparatus.

Thirdly, the refusal of the strikers to accept the terms negotiated for them, i.e. the conversion by the workers of their strike from merely economic to the political aim of a change of government to be imposed by the force of the people. This would have been a further step in the revolution towards the decisive change of the class in power.

Fourthly, the persistence of the strike, very widely indeed, after the final acceptance by the revisionist CP and CGT of de Gaulle's ultimatum, with the struggle still continuing as we go to press (19.6.68).

All this shows how the French working people and students were ready for an anti-capitalist socialist revolution and ready to impose such a revolution on the class in power.

The immediate prospect with no overall recognised revolutionary leadership is necessarily grim. Only a well-organised revolutionary party can hope to defeat the well-organised counter-revolutionary forces of fascism mobilised by de Gaulle.

But whether under capitalist pseudo-democracy or in conditions of fascist illegality, the leadership of the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party of the working people will develop under the combined impulse of workers and students, since Marxism-Leninism alone provides the necessary tried revolutionary theory.

"Workers Broadsheet" alone among English Marxist-Leninist publications has been insisting that here in Britain the situation is already potentially revolutionary. This means that all that is missing to achieve an actually revolutionary situation is the revolutionary leadership of a Marxist-Leninist Party with mass strength. The continuing resistance of our organised workers to the state-imposed wage freeze, and now our developing student revolt against their conditions of study, led by the politically most advanced students and younger teachers, show that the situation here

is potentially no less revolutionary than in France.

The thesis currently fashionable in certain quarters that you can act first and think and organise afterwards can be understood as a reaction against the don't-act-at-all policy of the pseudo-Marxist revisionist "Communist" Parties of the west, who have in fact, even if not in theory, been revisionist since they let Hitler into power without effective resistance and then forgot all about a mass line in the period of the Popular Fronts.

But should we throw out the organisational principles of Leninism because the post-Leninist leadership in Europe was unable to achieve the multiple and most difficult tasks that faced the revolution in the period of the development of the first socialist state, during the first historical experience of the dictatorship of the proletariat?

Because the old revisionist CP of Cuba was anti-revolutionary, is it not absurd to deduce that a revolution does not need a party, that a revolution can possibly be successful without a party, or that such a revolutionary party need not be directly Marxist-Leninist, can take as its model the heroic failure of Che Guevara rather than the heroic success of Ho Chi Minh?

Splendid as have been the revolutionary achievements of Cuba, is it not absurd to set Fidel up as an alternative to Mao? Mao Tse Tung has developed Marxism to a new stage, and this is what revolutionaries must make use of all over the world if they want to succeed in developing a socialist society, including that first all-important step, the seizure of power by armed strength from the capitalist ruling class.

All those who wish to devote their lives to help create a socialist society must understand the absolute need to unite their efforts, if they are in turn to unite all those who can be united against the main enemy, imperialism led by US imperialism.

In this struggle it is certain that the students will play a most important part. If they do this as Marxist-Leninists, workers and students together will be irresistible.

But if students and young workers allow themselves to be diverted and to follow such preaching as "revolution in the revolution" as an alternative to the Marxism of today, the Thought of Mao Tse Tung, they will find themselves going up a petty bourgeois blind alley, as have all Trotskyists in the past.

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