

T H E G E N E R A L S T R I K E

(May - June, 1968)

by

Francois de Massot.

First published in French as Supplement to
"Informations Ouvrieres", No. 437

Translated into English
by John Archer
and
Margaret Johns

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THE GENERAL STRIKE
IN FRANCE

(MAY - JUNE 1968)

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by Francois de Massot

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WHY THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN

On Monday, May 27, 1968, Seguy, the secretary-general, and Frachon, the chairman, of the C.G.T., who had just accepted the Grenelle agreements, were received by the workers at Renault-Billancourt with shouts of "Do not sign!", and this call was soon echoed all over France by the millions of strikers who had been informed by the radio. The strike was to spread further and to deepen; for several days the bourgeois state tottered on its foundations. This forced from the pen of the old worshipper of the Christ of Gold, Francois Mauriac, a cry from the heart of the whole capitalist class: "I felt myself passionately on the side of the threatened state." It seemed that in France the days of the rule of profit were numbered.

Five weeks later, on June 30, the ten million strikers had gone back to work. The elections produced the "un-matchable Chamber", the strongest majority which the party of General De Gaulle ever won.

How was such a "miracle" possible? That is what Francois De Massot's book enables to be understood. His analysis follows step by step and day by day, even hour by hour and trade union by trade union, the unfolding of the greatest general strike in history: it takes apart its mechanism and elucidates its internal logic, enabling its lessons to be drawn.

At first glance, this book is in fact different from all the abundant literature devoted to what its authors call, according to their tendencies, the "May Movement" or "The May Events", in this respect: it does not concentrate on the student movement and the University, but it describes it well and shows what was its place in the whole business. However, it is devoted above all to what was effectively the essential, that is, to the working class and then to the working masses, to the workers' movement, its trade union and political organisations, its leadership and its vanguard. For the author, history has not become that of the intellectual critics who struggle against the "consumer society"; as it was for Marx, history is the history of class struggles, of the struggle of the proletariat against capitalist exploitation. The working class is more than ever the subject of history, the only force capable of providing a progressive solution to the present crisis of humanity. It has, once more, demonstrated this strikingly and on an unprecedented scale in May - June 1968. The struggles of the students find their full significance, and the full implications of their struggles can be appreciated, precisely as an integral part of the struggle of the exploited against their capitalist exploiters, against the regime of private property in the means of production, against the policy of reaction all along the line, of taking back the past gains of the workers and of democracy, to which the bourgeoisie today must have recourse in order to maintain that regime.

There is another characteristic of this book which cannot fail to strike the reader, even when fore-warned. He or she cannot avoid being astonished to notice the extent to which the press and the authors of books have misrepresented, distorted, disguised and faked the real unfolding of the events and, still more, the real positions of different currents, organisations and tendencies, and have done so to a far greater extent than was to be expected, thanks to starting from a wrong standpoint, ignorance, incomprehension and, very often, pure and simple bad faith.

Whether we have to deal with the origin of the student demonstrations, the days when the barricades were up in the Latin Quarter, the demonstration of May 13, the conditions in which the General Strike broke out on May 14, or with the positions of the C.G.T., of the French Communist Party or of the C.F.D.T. with their pose as "left-ist", the attitude of someone like Cohn-Bendit on May 10, the slogans and the tactics proposed by the former Revolutionary Communist Youth and its Pablo-ite sources of information - in every case De Massot's presentation is solidly supported by quotations from the press, leaflets, documents of all kinds. Most of the time they render commentary unnecessary and make his presentation ir-refutable. The picture which he gives is very different and often the opposite to what writers of the history of May - June have hitherto provided.

Naturally ignorance, stupidity and deliberate lying have reached their height when the problem was that of the real policies of the proletarian revolutionaries, of those Communists who "have no interests apart from those of the working class as a whole", but "in the various phases of evolution through which the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie passes, they always advocate the interests of the movement as a whole", that is to say, the Trotskyists of the former O.C.I., the vanguard militants of the Workers' Alliance, grouped round their journal, "Informations Ouvrieres" and the young militants gathered round "Revoltes" and the former F.E.R. The texts and documents the great majority of which the other writers have very largely ignored, reveal quite clearly what really were their policies and their intervention, day by day.

* * *

Before May - June 1968, it was regarded among the revisionists and especially among the disciples of Ernest Mandel, as good form, to explain that capitalism had become "neo-capitalism" and was in a position to resolve, or at any rate to attenuate, its contradictions; that, under neo-capitalism, the productive forces were experiencing a new phase of impetuous growth, which was permitting the essential demands of the masses to be satisfied; and that, for that reason, the working class in Europe and USA had ceased for many years to be revolutionary - therefore the "epicentre" of the revolution was situated for a whole period in the so-called backward countries. Those who preached this thesis - Mandel's version of the Mao-ist or Castr-ist "storm zone" or of F. Fanon's "proletarian nations" - had nothing but irony for those Marxists who started from the world unity of the class struggle, who demonstrated that, for the French proletariat, solidarity with the workers and peasants of Vietnam meant the struggle to overthrow capitalism in France, and that the programme of class-collaboration of the F.L.N. was a danger to the future of the Vietnamese revolution. The general strike of May - June, in the course of which ten million workers mobilised against capitalism and its state, on the one hand, and the Paris negotiations on the other, momentarily silenced this form of revisionism. But revisionism remains only more lively under other forms, all of which lead to denying to the world proletariat and above all to the workers in the advanced countries of Europe and USA, their historic mission.

In the 1950's the petty bourgeois "revolutionaries" entrusted to the Kremlin bureaucracy and to its satellites, the Communist Parties of Western Europe, the task of mobilising the worker-masses against capital. A little later, they were to discover the new supreme saviours in Fidel Castro, in Ben Bella, even in Sekou Toure. Finally, we have had the spectacle of Pierre Frank, who had only the day before signed the appeal for a thousand million francs for Vietnam alongside the Gaullist Capitan, proclaiming the Sorbonne to be the first free territory of the Soviet Socialist Republic! From that time onward, the students were promoted to the role of revolutionary leadership of the working class; these "Marxists of a special kind" were going over by this road to the anarchist theory of the different "powers" (student power in the University, peasant power in the country and workers' power in the factory...) This conferred on them the "advantage" of dropping what Marx set out as the aim of the historic struggle of the working class, the overthrow of the bourgeois state and the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The common denominator of all these forms of centrism, which may well try to cover itself with "left", "revolutionary" phrases is precisely that: it refuses to lay down the strategy and the tactic of the proletariat in the struggle for power. This strategy itself is summarised in the struggle for the unity of the front of the working-

class and of its organisations, a struggle which, in May 1968, took on the specific form of the slogan of a National Central Committee for the General Strike.

We may read, in the Manifesto of the O.C.I. which was drafted at the end of 1967:

"The United Front will group together trade unions and workers' parties in a common struggle, class against class. Its highest expression will be the workers' committees, organised on the basis of the workshop, the factory, the building site and the office, federated locally, regionally and nationally, bringing together the delegates from all the workers. In opposition to the organised, centralised power of the bourgeois state, it will erect the organised, centralised power of the working class, behind which the peasants, the small tradespeople, managers and all the petty bourgeois layers which are threatened in their living conditions by finance-capital".

This was precisely the perspective which opened up with the general strike in the strike committees and their federation and centralisation in the national Strike Committee. It is not surprising that this slogan ran into as much hostility from the centrists as from the reformist and Stalinist leaders of the trade union centres.

For the characteristic of the centrists is that they refuse to join battle against the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement, despite all their declamations against "Stalinist filth". To refuse to join the struggle for the United Front of the workers and their organisations, and to counterpose to it what is claimed to be unity at the base, which simply makes an abstraction of the organisations which the working class has built up through a century and a half of struggles and sacrifices, organisations by way of which it has formed itself as a class conscious of itself and of the struggle which it wages against capital, and in which it necessarily assembles in order to wage this struggle, to confuse these mass organisations with their bureaucratic leaderships, to shout "The C.G.T. betrays!" and to strike out with a noble gesture the unions and the political parties of the working class from the map of the class struggle - this is, in fact, to run away alike from the struggle against the bureaucracies and from that against the bourgeois state. It means adapting oneself to the policies of the leading bureaucrats the louder one denounces them in words - it means distinguishing oneself from them only as a photographic negative differs from a positive - it means existing only as the shadow cast by the apparatuses, instead of situating oneself from the point of view of the overall historic interests of the proletariat.

On the contrary, the present book necessarily concentrates on the relations between the masses and the apparatuses which control them. It places at the heart of its analysis the movement of the working class in the general strike. It shows on each page how the struggle of the vanguard for the United Front is inseparable from its struggle against the policy of the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement.

* * *

The Second International, as a leadership of the working class in the struggle against capital, revealed its bankruptcy in August 1914, when each national leadership of social-democracy united with the bourgeoisie of its own country to defend the "fatherland" of the imperialist gangsters, breaking the class unity of the world proletariat. If powerful social-democratic parties have survived to this day and organise in their ranks the great majority of the working class in such countries as Britain and West Germany, it is simply thanks to the degeneration of the Stalinist parties.

The Communist International was founded by Lenin and Trotsky after the victory of the October Revolution, in order to make up for the bankruptcy of the Second International as the party of the world proletarian revolution. The reflux of the proletarian revolution in Europe after 1921 - 23, the isolation of the first workers' state in the USSR on a material base much inferior to that of capitalism at the period, led to the degeneration of the Soviet state, at the heart of which a conservative bureaucracy usurped power, with its privileges bound up with the maintenance of capitalism in the rest of the world and above all in the advanced countries. This bureaucracy liquidated the Communist International and turned the Communist Parties of the whole world into instruments for maintaining its power in the USSR and therefore for maintaining the bourgeois order in the rest of the world.

The working class formed itself as a class by struggling consciously against capitalist exploitation while building its mass organisations. Political centralisation and the unity in action which are necessary in the struggle require in turn that these organisations equip themselves with cadres, a leadership and an apparatus which at the beginning were the instrument of the will of the masses, the instrument of the class which had given birth to them. Lenin demonstrated how the formation in the great imperialist countries of a workers' aristocracy which derived its income from the super-profits realised by the monopolies thanks to exploiting the entire world, had led to the degeneration of the social-democratic apparatus and to its transformation from being the instrument of the proletariat for its emancipation into an agency of the enemy class within the very heart of the workers' movement. Trotsky and the Left Opposition analysed how the degeneration of the workers' state in the USSR led to "the definite passing over of the Communist International to the side of the bourgeois order", to the transformation of the international apparatus created by the October Revolution into an instrument of the counter-revolutionary bureaucracy of the Kremlin.

De Massot demonstrates that the explanation of the "paradox" of the general strike of May - June 1968 lies in analysis of the relations between the French working class and the Stalinist apparatus of the Communist Party of France and in the development of those relations. How could it come about that this latest movement, which was considerably wider and deeper than June 1936 or August 1953 in terms of the masses which it upraised, could not result on the political level in something like the assembly of the strike committees which was held in the Hotchkiss plant, June 9, 1936, or in the central strike committee which was formed in Nantes in August 1953? In June 1936 the Communist Party of France was in the process of forming with the organising cadres of the working class the links which were to make it the principal party of the workers in France. Today, the Stalinist apparatus which has controlled the majority of the French workers for nearly the two last generations has accumulated incomparable experience in the art of undermining the greatest struggles of the working class and of preserving the bourgeois order.

But in the same period the relations between the apparatus and the class have changed. The class struggle is stronger than all the stratagems of the apparatuses. The toilers and the organising cadres of the class carry on their struggles through the mass organisations, because they expect from them the realisation of their immediate and historic expectations. The renewed experience of the struggles over four decades have taught them that every time these expectations are disappointed. The openly counter-revolutionary policy of the Kremlin bureaucracy in the face of the rise of the political revolution in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself - which the occupation of Czechoslovakia was to highlight two months after the apparatus had undermined the general strike in France - and the open collaboration of Moscow and Washington against the Chinese revolution, fed this crisis. It was the task of the vanguard to open a positive solution to this crisis by making indissoluble links with the organising cadres of the working class in the struggle for the workers' United Front. The thesis on which Trotsky based the programme and the proclamation of the Fourth International in 1938: "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership": today is immediately at the centre of all the problems of the workers' movement.

* * *

The Second World War was not transformed into an international civil war, and world capitalism has the bureaucracy of the Kremlin to thank for that. At that time, thanks to their authority over the masses, the Stalinist parties succeeded, especially in France and in Italy, in holding back the working masses until the bourgeois state was back again in the saddle. None the less, the class struggle was to reveal itself stronger than the counter-revolutionary Holy Alliance sealed at Yalta and Potsdam. American imperialism put all its economic power behind restoring the capitalist economy in Western Europe. It was starved of outlets for its merchandise and its capital and opened up the Cold War, which compelled the bureaucracy to resort to a carefully controlled mobilisation and to eliminate the capitalist mode of production, which until that time had been carefully preserved, in the countries which it controlled in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile the revolution was to undermine the programme of "co-existence", of the capitalist status quo, which had been worked out at Yalta, in China, which Stalin had promised to Chiang Kai-Shek.

However, much as the fact may displease the revisionists, the massive aid which the American state provided to the bourgeoisies of Western Europe was not to result in a new phase of development of the productive forces under the aegis of capital. Rather it resulted in a period of accumulation, the driving force of which was and continues to be the massive injection of military credits. This has led, on an unprecedented scale, to a development of the parasitism which is normal to capitalism and to the creation of a growing mass of floating capital seeking profitable investment. This is the origin of the monetary crisis of today. As to the bureaucratic claim to be constructing "socialism" in a series of countries walled off from each other, this must rapidly end in a blind alley. The world unity of the class struggle was to re-assert itself powerfully, over all the iron curtains and all the power-blocs.

On June 17, 1953, the insurrection of the workers in East Berlin marked the beginning of a new European revolutionary wave. Two months later this was to spread over France and to launch the workers into the general strike. Then it spread over the whole of Eastern Europe, culminating in Hungarian revolution of the workers' councils in November 1956. At the same time the French workers, the conscripts called back into the army and the young soldiers, were mobilising to try to impose, against their own imperialism, a revolutionary solution to the war in Algeria, and to extend their hand to the North African workers and peasants over the ruins of capitalism. We know how the Stalinist bureaucracy managed to chloroform the workers of France, to divert and then to fragment the struggle of the youth against the "filthy war", while at the same time they supported imperialism by voting for special powers to be given to the Mollet government, on March 13, 1956. The bureaucracy could then, six months later, drown in blood the second Hungarian republic of workers' councils. The revolutionary wave ebbed. The way was clear for De Gaulle to come to power in May 1958. For a decade the initiative passed into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Even in December 1967 the manifesto of the OCI could write correctly:

"At the present time, imperialism has recovered the political initiative in the world class struggle. The intervention of US imperialism in Vietnam goes so far as the extermination of masses of Vietnamese workers and peasants, in order to prevent any new expansion of the revolution in Asia. It is the starting point for a counter-offensive, the aim of which is to destroy the conquests of the Chinese revolution. With support from imperialism and from the Kremlin bureaucracy, the 'national bourgeoisies' of the economically backward countries are undertaking a reactionary offensive against the masses of workers and peasants. From Indonesia to Cuba by way of Africa, this counter-revolutionary offensive is taking shape. In Indonesia and Algeria it takes the form of military coups d'etat. In Cuba it reveals itself in the deeper and deeper bureaucratisation of the regime, which is a prelude to the final strangling of the revolution. In the economically developed capitalist countries of Europe, the attempt to destroy the workers' movement is proceeding. In Greece, white terror has won. In France, in Britain, in Belgium and in Germany, the bourgeois state is trying to destroy the organisational independence of the working class, particularly that of its trade union organisations, and to deny to it all right to its own political expression. The pressure of imperialism is growing at the same time on the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe, dislocating their economies. In the USSR as in the countries of Eastern Europe, the pro-bourgeois tendencies are strengthening and growing. They are permeating the whole economy and are expressing themselves openly within the State apparatus. At the same time, repression bears down on everyone who expresses a tendency to the regeneration of socialist democracy."

The same document, it is true, stresses the political perspective could be seen differently:

"De Gaulle may succeed in inflicting a new defeat of the workers on the French proletariat and in destroying or poisoning its organisations. The entire European proletariat risks being defeated. On the contrary, the French working class may recover the initiative in the class struggle; they may impose the realisation of the United Front on the leaders of the traditional organisations of the working class and they may go into struggle against the bourgeois regime. Then the bourgeoisie of Western Europe and the bureaucracy in Eastern Europe and even in the USSR would stand on the brink of the abyss. The hour will strike for the construction of the only united Europe which history places on its agenda, the Socialist United States of Europe, the Europe of workers' councils, the spring-board for the struggle for the World Socialist Federation."

Effectively it was the second of these routes which the French workers opened in May - June 1968 for the international and especially the European working class. They needed only a few months to emerge from the stupor into which the dislocation of the general strike by the leading apparatus had plunged them. In December 1968, the working class renewed the attack on capital - an attack marked by the united strikes in Renault and Peugeot, by the demonstration of the Renault workers at Billancourt, by the railwaymen's strikes in the South-West, by the set-back which they inflicted on the divisive "day of action" which the CGT organised on February 12, by the united strike into which the trade union leaders were forced on March 11, by the resistance of the students which halted the Faure reforms and, finally, by the campaign for No! in the referendum which the class imposed on all its trade union and political organisations and which resulted on April 27 in the fall of De Gaulle, less than a year after the general strike.

It is not the place in this preface to go on to analyse this historic turn on the world scale which put the initiative back again into the hands of the working class. Such an analysis will be found in No. 544 of "La Verite", appearing at the end of June 1969. The fall of De Gaulle happened at the moment when "normalisation" was having difficulty in making progress in Czechoslovakia and could not break the will to resist of the workers and the young people. At this time in greater and greater numbers workers and intellectuals, like the docker Martchenko, the ex-general Grigorenko, the former kolkhos chairman Jakhimovitch, were following Pavel Litvinov and Larissa Daniel in defying in the name of Lenin the bureaucratic repression in the USSR itself. At this moment also the social crisis was sharpening in Italy and the workers in Britain were rejecting the anti-trade union legislation of Harold Wilson and forcing the British trade unions to oppose Wilson openly.

The world bourgeoisie had to scrap its whole strategy. The aggravation of the contradictions of capitalist society, of which the monetary crisis is no more than the sharpest symptom and which threatens the capitalist market with dislocation, obliges them still more than previously and especially in France, to try to take back from the workers all their past conquests, to cut their living standards heavily, to reduce millions to unemployment or to being unable to use their skills and to destroy the organisations by which the workers form themselves as a class. The heavy expenditure on the election campaigns cannot wholly conceal the bourgeois forecasters of greater austerity and the sinister creakings of the monetary system. But Bonapartism in the style of De Gaulle, which meant realising these aims by the "cold" road, received its death-blow in May - June 1968. From that time onwards the bourgeoisie has known that it could realise its plans only by a bloody confrontation with the workers. It knows that it has to proceed to civil war. But the fall of De Gaulle shook the State to its foundations. It was in vain that the apparatuses, following April 27, hastened to break the unity of front which the workers had realised. It was inevitable that the workers would demand payment of the draft which history signed for them on April 27, 1969, when it fell due. They were to take up the fight again where they had left it in May - June 1968, with a heightened awareness that the satisfaction of their demands was inseparable from the struggle for political power, with a clearer understanding of the role of the leading apparatuses and a strengthened determination not to let the apparatuses close again the road to victory. On the centenary of the Paris Commune, the French working class was to be well able to resume its place in the vanguard of the world proletariat and to try once again to "storm the heavens" in conditions incomparably more favourable to its success.

For the vanguard grouped round "Informations Ouvrieres" emerged strengthened from the general strike; it has at each stage fed the deep movement of the class and given it a clear, coherent perspective. It fought on February 5 for the double No! in the referendum - No! to De Gaulle and No! to corporatism; it stressed that the general strike of March 11 could not fail to have important consequences; it opened the campaign on the evening of April 27 for a single candidature of the workers' organisations. By doing so it formed strengthened links in struggle with a growing number of militants and of workers' organisers.

On May 22 this vanguard brought together 4,200 workers and young people at the Mutualite meeting hall in Paris, under the banner of the struggle for these inseparable aims: the realisation of the United Front of the workers, the destruction of the bourgeois state and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the construction of the revolutionary party and the reconstruction of the Fourth International. The workers' vanguard will enter the coming struggles more numerous, more conscious of its aims and better implanted in the working class. Francois De Massot's book will help it in its task.

INTRODUCTION

HEARING THE CONFRONTATION

"Our institutions will apply in political relations. Therefore, we do not expect to be paralysed by crises such as those from which we have suffered so much in the past."

(Charles De Gaulle, President of the Republic, in his message for the New Year, 1968)

The "events" in May - June 1968 still present mysteries to many of those who have commented on them. As sudden as lightning, a social cataclysm hit a tranquil society. The beginning of the peace talks in Paris between the American government and the representatives of North Vietnam marked the highest diplomatic triumph of the regime. With the opening of the Common Market a few weeks away, the promulgation of the decrees on employment, social security and corporate structure were not encountering any serious difficulties. France, prosperous and asleep, was following the smooth road which a firm but congenial regime was opening before her.

To accept this picture would be to accept as good coin the false money of appearances. It would be to take as a faithful reflection of reality the comedy of greatness that was being played on the diplomatic scene and the magisterial boredom of the ministerial speeches.

A REGIME OF CRISIS

In fact, old French imperialism was engaged in a bitter, difficult struggle to survive. The French bourgeoisie, in order to maintain its rule, had had to sacrifice Parliamentary democracy and to entrust itself to the leadership of a "strong power", un-accountable. The installation of Gaullist Bonapartism in 1958 met in the first place an urgent need; to prevent the inevitable liquidation of the French "empire", producing a crisis which the Parliamentary system could not absorb, from leading to the bourgeois state itself being called into question. But in the last analysis the mandate which the bourgeoisie entrusted to its "supreme saviour" went much further. The Fifth Republic was to be the regime under which the political and social conditions to permit the French bourgeoisie to hold its position relative to its more powerful imperialist rivals to be forged.

In other words, in order that French industry could become competitive, it was necessary to take back from the working class the positions and the rights which it had won and to secure the conditions for its super-exploitation. Politically, this meant the end of the period of collaboration with the workers' apparatuses, as it had been practiced within the framework of the Parliamentary regime since 1945. The concessions which that system of bourgeois rule made necessary imposed general costs upon them which were incompatible with the needs of French imperialism. It was necessary once and for all to finish with the workers' organised movement.

The necessity of imposing by force on a whole fraction of the bourgeoisie a policy conforming with the general interests of French imperialism delayed the accomplishment of this task. In order to carry through its Algerian policy, Bonapartism had to lean "to the left", on the apparatuses which control the working class. Consequently it could not attack the organisations of the working class and very specifically its trade unions.

Thanks to the policies of their leaderships the workers' organisations were utilised as auxiliaries of the Bonapartist regime. However, at the same time, they constituted a framework within which the combattivity and the consciousness of the working class developed; this was the result of their place in the class struggle and of the fact that they formed the elementary organisation for defending workers against exploitation.

That combattivity and consciousness were revealed in the powerful miners' strike in 1963. When Bonapartism wanted to turn against the working class, it ran into determined resistance, which obliged it to beat a precipitate retreat. The General-President had hastily to put back into his pocket the calling-up order which the miners had reduced to the status

of a ridiculous scrap of paper by continuing their strike.

The bureaucratic apparatuses had no intention whatever of calling into question the Gaullist regime, and were able to isolate the miners' strike. By themselves, the miners could not win the satisfaction of their principal demands. But while the results in terms of immediate gains were for this reason minimal, the political results on the contrary were of immense effect. The strike of the miners marked a turning point in the development of the class struggle in France.

NEARING THE CONFRONTATION

In the February 1968 issue of "La Verite", R. Clement wrote:

"De Gaulle suffered a stinging defeat in the first battle with the working class. The proletariat showed that it was still standing upright and that sooner or later it would have to be confronted if the plans of capital were to be fulfilled."

Over and above all the Parliamentary manoeuvring and the electoral interludes, this was the reality which dominated French political life.

We cannot retrace here the five years' class struggle which led to May 1968. But we can draw out its essentials.

The regime was preparing for confrontation, for the attack on the working class. Systematically, through its entire economic policy expounded in the Fifth Plan, in the Fouchet reforms and in the ordinances of 1967, it prepared to realise the aims for which it had come into existence and which had been defined in the Rueff-Armand Plan of 1958:

"to base the competitiveness of the French economy on solid foundations"

by the formation of:

"a small number of enterprises or groups on international stature".

Patiently, step by step, the regime encircled and hemmed in the organised workers' movement. Through the Commissions of the Plan, the CODER tec., it put in place the means to integrate the trade union organisations into the bourgeois state apparatus, to transform them from independent organisations into gear-wheels of the state machine.

This process of "gnawing" was accomplished with the complicity of the bureaucrats: the "classical" conditions of class collaboration disappeared; French capitalism could no longer agree to new concessions in return for the loyal services of the bureaucratic apparatuses. On the contrary, it had to take back the concessions it had made in the past. The logic of class collaboration, of refusal to break with the bourgeois state and to affirm the political independence of the working class today means the pure and simple liquidation of the workers' organisations. This was the road which these leaders took.

However, the regime did not attack on that front alone. At the same time it hit at the working class in its conditions of life and work, and organised unemployment. As its economic policy developed, so its direct attack on the working class became clearer; its concentrated onslaught on the working class was being prepared. Let us again quote the article by Clement on this subject:

"It would also be necessary to take into account many other features in order to get a complete picture: the re-organisation of the army, which created, by the side of the striking force, a mobile force for long-range intervention (parachutists and light armoured cars) which periodically roamed around Niger and Gabon, but the openly counter-revolutionary purpose of which was not in doubt, as well as a force for operational defence of territory conceived directly for systematic policing of the country: the re-inforcement of the police apparatus, the CRS, the city police-forces and the mobile guard... the re-organisation of the prefectorial apparatus... the re-organisation of the Ministry of the Interior; the virtually total suppression of the independence of magistrates; reform of the procedures of investigation (introducing secrecy); extension of the permitted period of detention without trial. To be sure, Bonapartism kept up all the day-to-day appearances of normal democratic life, but in reality there is practically no area of public or individual liberties which has not been gravely impaired in the most recent period..."

In the face of this offensive developing from every side, the working class resisted, despite the policies of its leaderships. Its resistance was expressed in the aspiration to

struggle "all together", which resulted in the day-long general strike of December 11, 1964, in the partial strikes in which extreme combativity was shown and in the utilisation by the workers of the fake "alibi activities" which the apparatuses were forced to organise.

In this situation there is marked the opposition between the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement and the militants who continue to represent these leaderships within the working class but who intend to remain loyal to their class and to its interests.

The organised vanguard by its intervention was to try to form new links with this layer of militants, who form the decisive elements of the organisation of the class, as well as with the young fighters in the class struggle whom these struggles reveal.

The Trotskyist militants grouped round "La Verite", who then formed the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, which was dissolved by the government on June 12, 1968, did not cease to wage the battle for the Workers' United Front and in the course of this struggle worked to regroup the vanguard which was consciously waging this fight in the workplaces and in the unions. Along with the OCI, these worked forged the means for a centralised, active regroupment, particularly in taking the initiative to publish "Informations Ouvrieres" as "the free tribune of the class struggle".

However the preceding summary remarks would remain too general to serve as a preface to the analysis of the general strike of May - June 1968, if one did not give its international dimension to the crisis of French imperialism and if one did not review with greater precision the period which directly prepared for the masses to come on the scene in May - June 1968.

THE INTERNATIONAL UNITY OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

French imperialism in its decline was fighting desperately to maintain its positions in the face of its more powerful imperialist rivals. But this struggle was developing in the period of the decay and generalised decadence of imperialism.

Marxists do not regard the international situation as forming a simple framework or an "external" factor mechanically determining the speed of events in a given country. The political and social crisis in France was at one and the same time a product - a specific expression - and a component of the international crisis of imperialism, a crisis the unity of which flows from the international character of the class struggle.

Taking back from the working class the concessions which had had to be conceded, and destroying its positions and its rights, were requirements not confined to the French bourgeoisie. Imperialism had set this objective before itself on the scale of the entire world, because the objective was a condition of its survival. It was on the world scale that this implacable reality sharpened the intensity of the class struggle and mobilised millions and millions of people in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

This accentuation of the class struggle undermines the basis of reformism on the international scale and renders untenable the position of the Russian bureaucracy, the power of which depends on a "status quo" which is being called into question: the extension of the proletarian revolution threatens its rule directly and obliges it to link itself more and more closely to imperialism: imperialism pursues its own ends through its collaboration with the bureaucracy, and these ends are the re-establishment of capitalism throughout the entire world.

In this way the crisis of the bureaucracy is linked with that of imperialism and opens the way to a modification of the relations within the international workers' movement, shaking the very foundations of the rule of Stalinism in the decisive sectors of that movement.

This was the perspective within which the struggle in France for the organised revolutionary vanguard was designed. The Manifesto of the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste said:

"Already in France the bourgeoisie is undertaking to make the workers pay for the rationalisation of its productive apparatus, in order to try to stand up to competition in the world market. The bourgeoisie threatens the workers in their health and their very lives, in their right to medical treatment and medicines. Already in the para-

dise of capital, in USA, a quarter of the population, men, women and children, citizens of the 'other America' are definitively rejected from the "society of abundance". They will never find their place in it again. They lead a precarious life with nothing to live on but the relief which the capitalist state pays them out of fear that they may revolt. 'In order to be able to exploit a class', wrote Marx and Engels a hundred and twenty years ago, 'it is necessary to ensure that it has conditions in which it can at least exist as slaves... The bourgeoisie is incapable of ruling because it cannot assure to its slave the means to exist even within the framework of his slavery, because it is obliged to let him sink to a condition in which it has to feed him rather than being fed by him. Society can no longer live under the bourgeoisie; in other words, the existence of the bourgeoisie is no longer compatible with society'. This prediction is being fulfilled at this moment before our eyes on a gigantic scale. It is only by recklessly increasing the armaments industry - the forces of destruction - that the bourgeoisie can manage to prevent the productive forces from breaking open the strait-jacket of private property in the means of production and exchange and of the frontiers of the national state, which paralyse their growth. Nearly a thousand milliards of gold francs are absorbed every year in production for war - a thousand times what the struggle against cancer absorbs. Nearly the whole of scientific research is devoted to production for war. The war of extermination which American imperialism is waging in Vietnam shows the whole of humanity the future which awaits it. 'We shall bomb them back into the Stone Age' screamed an American general. From Hitler's gas chambers to the massacres in Vietnam, capitalism remains true to itself. From now on it has no perspective to offer to its slaves but decadence or death - decadence first and death after. In the arsenals of thermonuclear war, there are more than a hundred times enough to destroy all life on the planet. 'Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.' wrote Trotsky in 1938 in the programme of the Fourth International. Today this catastrophe casts its profile on the horizon. The nightmare of a whole planet reduced to nothing but a radio-active desert, on which will float at the will of the winds the ashes of four thousand million years of evolution of life, of two million years of the progress of the human race and of a century and a half of struggles to free the oppressed and exploited masses - this nightmare mercilessly haunts the conscience of humanity.

At the same time, the army of the socialist revolution - the exploited and oppressed masses - do not cease to battle against capital and its agents at one or another point on the surface of the earth. They have brought down capitalism on a third of the planet. In France itself, in the course of the last historic period, the workers have three times, in 1936, in 1944 and in 1953 mobilised class against class and joined battle for power. Again in 1963 the miners tried to draw the whole working class into united, general action, to which at every new opportunity the workers do not cease to seek the road. In USA the risings of the blacks, which in many cases draw into their ranks workers belonging to other minorities and even whites, are only the struggles of the advance-guard of a gigantic class war. In Vietnam the revolutionary heroism of the workers and the peasants obliges Wall Street to go on investing fresh forces, and helps a political and social crisis to ripen in USA. In China the workers, with the youth organised in the Red Guards, mobilise en masse against the threat of capitalist restoration."

MORE AND MORE PROBLEMS DEMANDING SOLUTION

To read the declarations which followed the legislative elections in March 1967, everyone was pleased: the leaders of the French Communist Party, of the S.F.I.O. and the bourgeois politicians of the F.G.D.S., because they all had more deputies, and the Gaullists because the narrow majority which they had in the Parliament was enough for the Parliament to serve the regime or, if the occasion arose, to be liquidated.

But the problems were accumulating behind the electoral facade... The fateful date for the opening of the Common Market was approaching, while it was clear that the Bonapartist regime had hardly begun to realise the indispensable economic and social measures that it had announced and that its delay promised catastrophic effects. Now it had to proceed by forced marches. Problems also were piling up for the working class, which was making the cruel experience of the results of the "social" policy of the regime, while it became aware every day of the ineffectiveness of the orientation which the leaders of the workers' movement advised.

Despite coherent efforts which the Bonapartist regime had undertaken, it was far from having adapted the French productive apparatus to the necessities of the world market. Concentration, rationalisation, an investment policy, tax reliefs, all this did not prevent - to give one example but one which has significant value - that out of the first one hundred firms in the world, only three were French. In its efforts at "reform" the government ran into limits set by the very conditions of capitalist domination in France. Historically formed as a class of "small proprietors", interested in living from investments and keeping down the population, the French bourgeoisie could not at one stroke adapt itself to the requirements of the situation which it faced. The "breaks-through" which certain vanguard branches of industry effected, and the concentration in these outstanding industries, could not do away with the fact that France was still the country with 800,000 private enterprises. If they displaced these layers too brutally, they would tear the very web of capitalist domination in France; the power of big capital had to accommodate itself for some time to come to the existence of "non-profitable", parasitic sectors. That made the settlement of accounts with the working class all the more urgent; the existence of a workers' movement independent of the state, a framework for organising and mobilising the workers, remained an objective obstacle to a sharp reduction in the share of wages in "selling prices"...

International conditions were even more insistent that the French bourgeoisie had to act. The dislocation of the international monetary system, the expression of the aggravation of the international class struggle, signified that the "struggle for existence" on the international market would be even tougher. None the less, the indices all show that the French bourgeoisie tackled this decisive turn only reluctantly. Industrial production was generally stagnating and exports were relatively falling.

Therefore, the offensive against the working class was organised, was widening and was speeding up.

1967 was to be a year marked by numerous concentrations. In aeronautics, Papon, a former police prefect, became president of Sud-Aviation, which took over part of the activities of Nord-Aviation. A few months later, Breguet and Dassault were to fuse. Regroupments and fusions were to dominate the development of the banking sector - where the Banque nationale de Paris was to be formed out of the B.N.C.I. and the C.N.E.P. In electrics, Thomson-Houston absorbed the C.S.F. In heavy industry, Babcock-Wilcox, Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique, Fives-Lille and Cail grouped part of their activities. In December, De Wendel, l'Union Siderurgique Lorraine and the Societe mosellaine de metallurgie regrouped to form Mendel-Sidor, which controls most of the metal-working in Lorraine.

This meant aggravation of working conditions, loss of skilled jobs, the threat to employment and the growth of unemployment. If there is one chapter in which the aims of the Fifth Plan went ahead, it is, moreover, unemployment; they got near to the 600,000 unemployed that they had forecast, because they reached 500,000, of whom the majority were young. In one year, according to the official figures, the number of unemployed aged between 18 and 24 rose by 64%.

But the bourgeoisie could not be contented with allowing the consequences of their economic orientation to act spontaneously. The full political implications of the offensive which was waged at rising speed against the working class was to reveal itself in the decrees about employment, rights to benefit, Social Security and the adaptation of firms to the Common Market.

THE ORDINANCES

Within the framework of the Bonapartist regime, Parliament is not the place where the problems of the bourgeoisie are discussed. Parliament is no more than an instrument of the government. Its secondary role was made clear hardly a month after the Parliament had begun to meet: on April 26 the Council of Ministers decided to demand from the Parliament the authority to settle the bulk of the economic and social problems by decree, up to October 31. On May 20, the Assembly fulfilled its role and stripped itself of all its rights to consider the internal policies of the government.

Earlier, on May 17, the workers had responded to the call of their trade union organisations, stopped work en masse and demonstrated in defence of their rights. The success of the movement expressed the will of the workers to struggle, but the leaderships of the workers' movement wanted May 17 to be a one-day event, a symbolic protest. They diverted the movement in the direction of ineffective petitions addressed to the Gaullist deputies; they

wore down and dissipated the workers' combativity in discouraging isolated actions.

There was another possible road - that which the working class and the youth were to impose in May 1968 - the road of the united struggle of the workers mobilising against the government by the methods of the class struggle and blocking the development of the anti-working class undertaking of Gaullism. On May 1, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste distributed a leaflet which declared in particular:

(See page 6a.)

There was an interval during which the government had its hands free, and it proceeded to action. Summer 1967 saw the appearance of the different decrees. They formed a consistent package of anti-working class measures:

On Employment: they aimed, not at re-absorbing the unemployed, but at utilising the situation created by the rise in unemployment to meet the needs of capitalist profits.

The avowed intention of the National Employment Agency was to improve the mobility of labour. Thus, "at state expense", was created an organisation which can be compared to hiring agencies like "Manpower", with the ambition of controlling 30 - 35% of the national workforce. The problem was to handle a mass of workers who had lost their trades, who could be mercilessly exploited and moved about from one end of the country to the other according to the needs of profit without guarantees.

On Social Security: the problem was to dismantle a conquest of the working class. The decisive object was to take back from the workers and to re-integrate in the circulation of profit the deferred pay which really belonged to the workers and which the Social Security funds represented. To achieve this, the institution of Social Security itself had to be broken up; all control by the workers over the funds which belong to them had to be taken away, and the health of hundreds of thousands of workers had to be threatened by increased contributions, restriction of risks covered and cuts in state support.

On Workers' Involvement: the actual wording of the introduction to the ordinance on workers' involvement defined its content: "The workers must be made to participate in the expansion of the firms and they must be directly interested in it, all the more because the Fifth Plan rightly makes economic growth dependent on a rise in investment principally due to self-financing". We can see that the question here is by no means one of simple deception, as the leaders of the workers' movement have asserted. The question is TO MAKE THE WORKERS PARTICIPATE IN THEIR OWN SUPER-EXPLOITATION. The problem is to tie the trade union organisations to the realisation of the production targets of the firm, to make the trade union representative an agent of the management, to transform the trade union organisations from being the means of expressing the workers' demands into gear-wheels of the employers and the state. Here we are dealing with an important step towards integrating the unions into the state.

On the Adaptation of the firms to the Common Market: This ordinance settled a whole series of measures, and, in particular, tax reliefs for firms which modernise, showing that the taxpayers in general - that is, in the first place, the workers - carry the expenses of the development of the great capitalist enterprises. As P. Bauchard wrote in "L'Annee dans le Monde": "the great mass of the industrialists represented in the C.N.P.F. welcome the last series of ordinances in particular about re-organisation and improvement of the structures of French industry".

After the ordinances were made public, the attack on the working class was stepped up. In the closing months of 1967, no day passed without news of the closure of factories, about "recycling" and about sackings.

THE WORKING CLASS REACTS

But, the working class does not submit without reacting. From the beginning of 1967 there broke out strike movements, which were real battles and the stages in the mobilisation of the class as a whole. In February, there was the strike at Dassault in Bordeaux, in March and April, there were the strike in Rhodiaceta at Lyon and at Besancon and the strike of the monthly-paid workers at Saint-Nazaire.

After the demonstration of May 17 - the effectiveness of that mobilisation against the special powers as due to the efforts of the militants - the bureaucratic leaderships devoted themselves to breaking the movement up by calling out different layers separately, while at the same time they kept up on the national scale all their collaboration

Leaflet of the O.C.I. May 1, 1967.

Down with the Special Powers!
 Defend Workers' and Democratic Liberties!
 Against the Destruction of Young People!
 For Guaranteed Jobs and Skills!
 Defend the Buying Power of Our Money!

The workers' organisations and trade unions - and in the first, the C.G.T., C.G.T. - F.O. and F.E.N. - must call in unity for

500,000 WORKERS AND YOUTH TO DEMONSTRATE IN FRONT OF THE
 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

All working women, all working men in France
 to demonstrate in front of the prefectures
 on the day when Pompidou proposes his draft law

Working women, working men and young people!

Worker militants of every tendency!

The Special Powers, which the government wants to take,
 lead straight to the situation which exists today in
 Greece.

The Greek bourgeoisie could not impose its class
 rule on the working masses. That is why it put
 the generals and the king in charge of destroy-
 ing the system of Parliament by a coup d'etat.
 Thousands and thousands of workers and militants
 are being sent to prison or to the camps.

THE LESSON MUST BE UNDERSTOOD

If the workers, the militants and their organisations
 do not unite to react quickly and forcefully, the
 Gaullist regime, which was born out of violence in
 1958, will impose by force the anti-working class pro-
 posals in the Fifth Plan.

THE THREAT IS CLEAR AND IMMEDIATE

THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME

The deputies of the French Communist Party and of the F.G.D.S.
 have put down a censure motion in the Parliament against the
 special powers.

The workers are ready to support this legitimate action.

BUT ONE THING IS CLEAR

No one can doubt that, if the workers are not mobilised,
 there will be a majority in the National Assembly in
 favour of the special powers.

Only the powerful, united, general demonstration of the
 workers, demonstrating the same day as Pompidou presents
 his draft law, in the Paris Region, in front of the
 Parliament building and in the provinces in front of the
 prefectures

CAN ENSURE THAT THE CENSURE MOTION WINS

Militant workers of all tendencies, you want to struggle
 as disciplined, organised fighters, in defence of the in-
 terests of the working class and of liberties. A very
 heavy responsibility rests on your shoulders, that of

imposing united resistance, that of organising unity committees to organise the workers' demonstration.

The militant workers of all tendencies who, since April 15, have understood the dangers hanging over the workers and their organisations, took the initiative in struggling for the workers' organisations' central leaderships to organise.

THE NATIONAL UNITY CONFERENCE

to guarantee employment, to defend purchasing power, to oppose skilled workers being degraded and to defend liberties calls on workers and militants to come together and organise

FOR A DEMONSTRATION OF 500,000 WORKING MEN AND WOMEN,
IN FRONT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR ALL THE WORKING WOMEN, ALL THE WORKING MEN IN
FRANCE TO DEMONSTRATE IN FRONT OF THE PREFECTURES

May 1, 1967

with the regime, by participating in the structures of the Fifth Plan and in the management committees of the Social Security funds, the job of which was then to liquidate Social Security.

After work was resumed, the workers' resistance expressed itself again. It did so by movements like that at Rhodiaceta-Lyon, which brought the workers into opposition to steps by the employers which meant losing their job-security and every guarantee of earnings. The bureaucrats were to lead this movement into a blind alley by refusing to mobilise the workers in the Lyon region, and 87 people lost their jobs as a result. It did so by demonstrations like that at Le Mans, which "Informations Ouvrieres" described as follows:

"On October 2, Le Mans had been the scene of the powerful demonstration by peasants, which expressed the tragic state into which the needs of capitalism were driving the peasants. On October 10, the workers in Le Mans demonstrated against the ordinances and the police brutally charged the demonstration... The workers' will to struggle forced the trade union leaderships to organise another day of action. A central demonstration was planned for October 26. But the Prefect's office prohibited any demonstration and specifically said that 'no parade would be tolerated'.

The freedom to demonstrate, one of the most elementary democratic freedoms and one of the most necessary to the working class, was called into question. The workers in Le Mans knew how to defend it. 15,000 workers imposed the right to demonstrate, despite the attacks of the mobile guards and of the C.R.S. In the face of a considerable police presence and of armoured vehicles, they marched on the Prefect's office... In doing this, they were doing more than fighting a local battle: they showed that the working class did not intend to submit and they showed what was really at stake in the struggle".

Le Mans was not an isolated instance. Quimper, Mulhouse, Cholet, later Redon and above all, Caen were to declare that the determination of the workers not to accept poverty and decline, and to defend their rights and conquests, would not be undermined without a fight, that they would answer the provocations of the state and the employers by the methods of the class struggle, by strikes and demonstrations.

This is how the confrontation which broke out in May 1968 was prepared. The workers - and in their front rank the youth, who were directly affected by unemployment - did not accept what was being done to them. The special role of the young generations was expressed in particular among the students - the great majority of whom were threatened by the Fouchet Plan, which was adapting higher education to the needs of French capitalism for skilled manpower - who gathered in a while series of demonstrations in the university centres and who demonstrated in Paris on November 9. It was also expressed by the place in the vanguard which the youth, workers and students, held at Caen in the bitter battles which developed there, in which thousands of workers stood up to the efforts of the employers and the government to break the strikes by force.

The workers at Caen were isolated and had to retreat, because considerable repressive forces could be concentrated against them and, especially, because isolation prevented their movement from having a perspective. Repression came down on them. Militants were jailed, others were prosecuted for "obstructing freedom to work", and many lost their jobs. But the workers at Caen had shown that the working class, that the youth, would not yield and that when united they could find the road to struggle.

In the light of the general strike of May - June 1968, the battle which the workers of Caen put up appears as the battle of a vanguard as well as one of the elements which drew the whole working class into action. The strike, which began at Saviem, progressively won all the plants in the region. The state then intervened, under the naked form of its repressive forces, to force the workers to bend, denying them their right to strike in the name of "freedom to work", refusing them by force their right to demonstrate. The workers and the youth did not give way; confrontation and a rise in police brutality followed.

A correspondent for "Informations Ouvrieres" described the struggle which developed:

"While the workers could not impose strike committees on the trade union leaders, they did try to organise in the course of the demonstration of January 26 to resist the forces of repression, despite the appeals of the bureaucrats to be "dignified". The young workers,

the unemployed and the students played the leading role. The militants in general - and especially those of the French Communist Party, were defeated."

Yes! It was only a beginning!

THE ORGANISED VANGUARD INTERVENES

Throughout this period, in which the conditions were ripening for the formidable movement of May - June, the intervention of the revolutionaries, of the organised vanguard, was a factor in the ripening.

On June 24, 1967, 1.100 worker militants came together on the occasion of a meeting to discuss the National Conference for unity of action. We had here the first national meeting of the fighting force, forged in the class struggle itself, selected through stubborn activities, tireless, to plan how to bring about the conditions for a general resistance to the plans of the employers and the government.

These militants from all the trade union organisations and all the tendencies, represented the most vital sectors of the working class and a real experience of struggle and organisation: they adopted a resolution which ended as follows:

"We, militant workers from every tendency, and young people, decide today to form in every branch of industry, in the workplaces and the professions and locally, into 'Committees of Workers' Alliance'. We solemnly declare that it is not our intention to substitute ourselves for the organisations, and especially for the trade union centres, for the realisation of unity of action, a task which naturally falls upon the trade unions.

The COMMITTEES OF WORKERS' ALLIANCE undertake to struggle in all circumstances for the United Front, class against class, to become the instrument for the mobilisation and the resistance of the workers to exploitation.

The militants will struggle to obtain this objective by the method of conferences for united action being called in every branch of industry, in the work-places and in and between professions, for the formation of inter-union and inter-professional committees to resist the special powers, with the object of ending with a National Conference for Unity of Action."

The consistent line which dominated the whole orientation of the revolutionaries was that of bringing into existence the workers united front: class against class.

The need for the United Front rested on the deepest realities of the position in society of the working class, on the reality shared by all workers of capitalist exploitation, on the inevitable resistance which all workers, every layer, every category of the working class are obliged to oppose to capitalist exploitation. It is from the very place of the working class in production and in the social relations which define capitalist society that the aspiration for workers' unity arises.

But the toiling people form themselves as a class through the organisations which they have built in the struggle against exploitation. These organisations are their means of coming together against the class enemy. Thanks to their objective place in the struggle - that is, independently of the policy of those who may lead them at any given moment - these organisations represent positions of the working class in its never-ending struggle against exploitation. The workers' United Front cannot be realised except through the class organisations of the proletariat.

But the United Front would be a hollow slogan - and not a strategy for rallying and unifying the whole class - if it were not conceived as a battle, a battle against everything that opposes the class unity, everything that divides it and, first of all, its political subordination to the bourgeoisie.

Consistent struggle for the United Front, therefore, implies a battle against the autocratic, bureaucratic leadership which today rule the organisations that belong only to the workers, a battle against the policy of class collaboration, to ensure the means of realising the unity of the workers and right from the start to ensure the total application of workers' democracy.

The political independence of the working class, workers' democracy and workers' unity are inseparable terms which are spelt out in the strategy of the United Front. The defence of such an orientation as that calls for an organised, fighting force to be got together, in which alone can be posed all the political problems of the class struggle.

Efforts to bring together the manual and intellectual youth, who were most severely hit by the plans of big business, were naturally an essential part of the struggle for the United Front. On June 24, 1967, 1,000 young militants met on the initiative of the journal "Revoltes" and opened the perspective of a central demonstration of youth against destruction and poverty. On this perspective, the young revolutionaries were the organisers of effective struggles in several sectors and especially among students, where the Liaison Committee of Revolutionary Students was in the vanguard of the student demonstrations which throughout the first term in each university city received the visit of the Minister of National Education.

After the battles at Caen had emphasised the place of the youth in the general struggles of the class, the young militants round Revoltes issued a call for the central demonstration and for 3,500 young people to gather in Paris, representing the experiences of the battle for the central demonstration.

(For the text of their appeal, see page 9a).

At the same time, in every sector of the workers' movement, on the basis of the resistance of the workers to the ordinances and of the workers' will to find the means to strike an effective blow against the offensive of the employers and the government, the effort to organise the vanguard was going ahead.

The organised vanguard gathered round itself militants who did not want to agree to be the organisers of defeat. It pointed the way to an effective reply and used the example of the Social Security to impose the realisation of the United Front to organise a central demonstration of wage-earners. It exposed, in the Paris Transport system for example, the trap of the separate sectional strikes.

The Co-ordinating Committee of the Paris Region, which brought together militants from Paris Transport, Social Security and students and which postal workers and student teachers joined, was formed on the basis of this general activity and of the reality of the intervention of an organised vanguard in episodes which were the prelude to gigantic confrontations.

On May 1, this committee organised a meeting of workers which brought together over a thousand people and issued the following appeal:

"Having met in the Lancry Hall on May 1, in response to the call of the Co-ordinating Committee of workers and office staffs of Paris Transport, Social Security, postal workers, student teachers, students and Health Service workers:

Workers and young people from every tendency, members of the trade unions of the C.G.T., of C.G.T. - Force Ouvriere, of C.F.D.T., of F.E.N., of U.N.E.F. and non-unionists, believe it to be their duty to address the leading committees of the workers' organisations which are responsible for defending the interests of the working class and the youth, to demand that they bring about unity and that they raise all the obstacles which have piled up on the road to unity.

It is clear that the tactic of isolated sectional strikes, of half-cock demonstrations, of petititons that lead to nothing ends only in set-backs.

The workers do not understand why the leading committees of their trade union centres, when faced with the attacks from the employers and the government which concern everyone, refuse to prepare the generalised response of all the workers.

But one thing is certain. When the government mobilises the CRS of the whole of France against our comrades in Rhodiaceta (Lyon) or at Caen, only one reply is effective: the same day throughout France the trade union centres must call on all the workers and the youth out on demonstrations.

In Paris in front of the seat of government. In the provinces in front of the offices of the prefects.

Otherwise what will happen is what happened at Caen. The workers of Caen were isolated in the face of the general mobilisation of the CRS, they were hammered, and some were imprisoned. In spite of the unanimous desire to fight, the action led to a set-back.

Throughout the country, the workers and the youth know that.

In order to ensure the real defence of the interests of the workers and the youth,

THE CALL FOR THE CENTRAL DEMONSTRATION IN PARIS OF 3,500 YOUNG PEOPLE

Caen has been placed under martial law. Thousands of CRS, brought in from all over France, have batoned, beaten and imprisoned the workers who were fighting for their just demands.

At Caen on January 26 the young workers were in the forefront of the workers' demonstration.

At Caen, on January 19, the students demonstrated against the Minister for Big Capital, Peyrefitte, who had declared:

"There are too many students in the universities"

At Caen, some weeks earlier, the young peasants, the spear-head of the just demands of the peasants, demonstrated in front of the office of the Prefect.

BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED AT CAEN

For the first time for many long years, the young workers in the spear-head of the class fight persuaded the workers to organise!

On June 24, in Paris, 1,000 young people, brought together at the Mutualite in response to the call of Revoltes, belonging to different unions and different youth organisations, decided unanimously to struggle for their unions and their organisations to prepare together

FOR A DEMONSTRATION OF SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YOUTH IN PARIS

The Central Demonstration in Paris

Centralised demonstrations in front of the offices of the Prefects remain today, as yesterday, the aim to reach to force the employers and the state to retreat.

Today organising means, in districts, factories, building sites, offices, schools and the University, to form

COMMITTEES TO PREPARE FOR THE GATHERING OF 3,500 YOUTH AT THE MUTUALITE

Today organising means calling meetings of youth at all levels to impose the united struggle:

After the demonstration of the students in PARIS, CAEN, LE MANS, QUIMPER and MULHOUSE bear witness to the will to struggle of the working-class, peasant and student youth.

The young militants will raise themselves to the level of the responsibilities which are theirs.

3,500 youth at the Mutualite, representing the youth who have come from all over France, will come to declare that they are willing to fight and to organise.

The youth will not accept unemployment, down-grading and destruction without resisting.

The youth want to live. They will fight, because they know that they have to fight to live.

LONG LIVE THE UNITED STRUGGLE OF THE YOUTH!

THERE MUST BE A CHANGE OF DIRECTION. UNITY MUST BE REALISED. WE MUST PREPARE CAREFULLY IN DEMOCRATIC MEETINGS IN WORK-PLACES, PROFESSIONS, COVERING DIFFERENT UNIONS AND DIFFERENT PROFESSIONS, ON THE LEVEL OF DEPARTMENTS AND OF THE NATION, THE GENERALISED RESPONSES WHICH ARE NEEDED.

In this way revolutionary activity and policy were presented as^a factor in the development of the situation, in this period which was that of preparation for one of the most important struggles in which the French working class has ever been engaged.

This was true from more than one viewpoint. The effective, centralised activity of the organised vanguard formulated the aspirations of the most advanced fraction of the class in slogans and organisational solutions at each stage. This intervention enabled these solutions to be popularised by thousands of militants of every organisation - and especially by militants of the C.G.T. and the French Communist Party - who found in them the answer to their needs and to their will to organise the resistance of the workers and in this way helped the movement to ripen politically.

But the reality of the intervention of the revolutionary vanguard in this period may also be gauged from the violence with which the Stalinism bureaucracy attacked it. It tried by every means to isolate the revolutionary vanguard from that important layer of militants which it controlled but which was questioning it about its policies.

There was first of all the attempt to isolate the vanguard by means of terror. In Avignon on November 15, 1967, a commando organised by the Stalinist apparatus tried to disrupt a meeting organised by the O.C.I. and Revoltes to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution. They failed. The same operation was repeated in Lyon on November 26 likewise on the occasion of a meeting organised by the O.C.I. to commemorate October 1917. There too they failed. On December 11, 1967, at Montrouge, it was a group of full-timers and leaders of the French Communist Party who attacked a local meeting of young revolutionaries with truncheons and boards with nails sticking out. Several young militants were hurt, two seriously.

But the campaign of physical violence turned back against its authors. They remained isolated even from the militants of the Communist Party. The activity in relation to workers' democracy which the revolutionaries were then carrying on turned a wide layer of worker militants against the "terrorists".

The Stalinist offensive then continued by employing slander - against the Trotskyist militants in Social Security, in Clermont-Ferrand and in Nantes, or by organising a "witch-hunt" in the unions, as in Paris Transport and by employing their "ideological" arms. The Central Committee of the French Communist Party met on January 17 and 18, 1968. Its agenda included "the ideological battle and propaganda among the masses". The discussion was opened by Roland Leroy, who attacked the "left-ists" and stressed that "the most serious thing" was "that left-ist ideas were being spread under diverse forms". In other words, "the most serious thing" was that the solutions advanced by revolutionary militants were not presented as "generalities" but as precise answers to the most urgent pre-occupations of the members of the Communist Party itself.

We can then understand why in issue after issue, "L'Humanite" attacked the little groups which had no importance or influence, why the distribution and "assimilation of the lessons" of the brochure of Waldeck Rochet "What is a revolutionary in the France of today?" were regarded as urgent and why, finally, Laurent Salini was obliged, in "L'Humanite" for March 20, to reply to the call issued by Revoltes, falsifying it, to be sure.

The sensitivity of the counter-revolutionary apparatus of Stalinism to every threat of seeing its control over important sections of the youth and of the workers being weakened was considerable. The attack which it mounted against the revolutionary militants bears witness to the effectiveness of what they were doing, while tensions were rising within the working class.

THE INEVITABLE STRUGGLE

This introduction has to confine itself to the main outlines of the evolution of the situation. There is not the slightest intention of giving the impression that that the general strike which unfolded in May 1968 was mechanically determined by what preceded it, that this large, tumultuous movement of the entire class, which found its point of departure in the

determined struggle of the students was, as such, able to be foreseen.

Marxists are not prophets. Neither the moment, nor the form of the confrontation which the working class and the youth raised against the ~~state~~ and the bourgeoisie, could be foreseen. But the analysis of the situation and its development in class terms made it possible to state that the confrontation was inevitable. This is not reasoning after the event; the October issue of "Informations Ouvrieres" carried the head-line, "The Inevitable Struggle".

We have to insist on this point, because it is possible to understand May - June 1968 only with clear ideas. To the myth about a passive working class suddenly awakened from its torpor by the miraculous explosion of a "student revolt", it is necessary to counterpose the reality of a slow maturation within the very heart of the masses driven to struggle by the offensive of capital and its state, the reality of a whole process of struggles - of which the struggles mounted by the students form part.

To the "explanations" according to which the movement of millions of people could have been started by "minority agitations" - or, if you prefer, according to taste, an "international plot" or "left-ist provocations" - the reality opposes itself of a difficult rise, through partial struggles, set-backs, retreats, in the workers' consciousness, expressed and nurtured by the political activity of an organised vanguard, armed with the programme of the socialist revolution, with the method of Marxism, which intervened politically at each stage of the struggle.

CHAPTER ONETHE RESISTANCE OF THE STUDENTS DRAWS THE WHOLE CLASS
INTO MOBILISING

"These fake revolutionaries must be energetically un-masked, because objectively they serve the interests of the Gaullist regime and of the great capitalist monopolies...

The theses and the activity of these revolutionaries are laughable. All the more because generally there are the sons of big bourgeois, who despise the students of working-class origin, and who will quickly dim their 'revolutionary flame' to go manage their Daddy's business."

Georges Marchais, member of the Political Bureau of the French Communist Party, in "L'Humanite", May 3, 1968.

"The working class constantly suffers immeasurably greater injuries and insults from the lawlessness of the police with which the students have now come into such sharp conflict. The working class has already begun the struggle for its emancipation. It must remember that this great struggle imposes great obligations upon it, that it cannot emancipate itself without emancipating the whole people from despotism... The worker who can look on indifferently while the government sends troops against the student youth is unworthy of the name of socialist."

Lenin, from "The Drafting of 183 Students into the Army", in Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 418, published in "Iskra", No. 2, in February 1901

SET OUR COMRADES FREE!

On Friday, May 3 at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, a large force of police (some wearing crash helmets and some mobile guards) encircled the Sorbonne. In the interior of the old university, about 400 student militants, members of the U.N.E.F. and of various political organisations, Federation of Revolutionary Students, Revolutionary Communist Youth and Movement of March 22 - all organisations which were banned by the decree of June 12, 1968, were holding a protest meeting. It was against the closing of the faculty at Nanterre and the dangers threatening seven of their comrades who had been summoned before the University Council. They intended to defend the Sorbonne against an attack by the fascist group OCCIDENT, which had declared that it would cleanse the Latin Quarter of the "Bolshevik vermin".

At the written request of the Rector, whose name was Roche, the police made their way into the Sorbonne complex. The students were surrounded and in smaller numbers, so that they could not resist. In this way the police arrested the majority of the union and political leaders of the student movement. By about seven o'clock, therefore, everything seemed to be over. In fact, everything was just beginning.

Some students had gathered outside and had witnessed the arrest of their comrades. Suddenly, as a police van passed, some nameless student shouted, "SET OUR COMRADES FREE!" The cry was taken up and the young people gathered shouting the slogan, "SET OUR COMRADES FREE!"

A demonstration was organised. The police tried to disperse it; they used truncheons, to which the students replied by throwing paving stones. There were soon more than two thousands demonstrators, as school students, young workers and passers-by joined in. At the top of the Boulevard Saint-Michel a heavy lorry stopped: the driver got out and came to lend a strong hand to the students who were standing up to police who were running wild and charging furiously. The dull sound of tear-gas bombs, which was soon to become familiar, was continuous and the air became unfit to breathe. A photograph illustrates what this demonstration was better than any description: young people hastened to build a makeshift barricade, and under their arms, they still had their books.

The police called up re-inforcements and became more and more violent. They had difficulty in breaking the demonstration. It was not until 10.30 that evening that, in the classic phrase, "order was restored".

There were hundreds of wounded and nearly 600 arrests. The rector of the Academy of Paris announced that teaching was suspended at the Sorbonne.

Spontaneously, the students replied to police provokation by demonstrating. Thereby they called into question the plans of the government and checked the development of repression against the students.

But the spontaneous combattivity which revealed itself on the evening of May 3 did not come from nowhere. We must explain the struggles and the activity which produced it. In order to explain the fact that this demonstration, improvised in anger, led to a general mobilisation of students against police repression and governmental policy, we must look back at the range and the content of the struggles which preceded it, and to show the place of those struggles in the general development of the political and social situation in France.

There is one essential fact to start with: when the students in Paris hurled themselves on "the forces of order" on May 3, they had been preceded on this road in many other capital cities: at Tokyo, at Prague, at Warsaw, at Berlin, the students had been the starting-point of struggles of the highest political significance.

THE RANGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL STRUGGLES OF THE STUDENTS

On April 11 at Berlin an attack took place on the life of Rudi Duschke, one of the leaders of the S.D.S. (the socialist students' organisation of Germany, independent of the social-democratic leadership). The protest demonstrations which then took place were not slow in showing that they were more than a "simple reaction". One followed another over several days, gaining in intensity, and in every important city: Berlin, Bremen, Frankfurt, Munich, Essen and Cologne... The conflicts with the police were violent and young workers, apprentices and school students joined in. There can be no dispute that these demonstrations formed, because they were militant gatherings of students, a stage in the mobilisation of the German youth against the regime which caused the attack on Rudi Duschke's life and which - with the approval of the German Social-Democracy - brought in the anti-working class provisions of the state of emergency.

In November 1967 in Czechoslovakia, it was the students whose activity touched off the crisis which forced the bureaucracy to jettison Novotny and to make important political concessions to the masses, which were to lead to a process preparatory to political revolution, which the Kremlin was to interrupt by its counter-revolutionary aggression.

In March 1968 it was the students in Poland - joined by many workers in spite of the desperate campaign of slanders organised against them - who went into battle against the arbitrary rule of the police, against the "re-stalinisation" of Poland, against anti-semitism and for workers' democracy.

These are only a few examples. We could go on to mention the struggle of the students in Italy, the activity of the "Zengakuren" in Japan fighting effectively against the imperialist war in Vietnam, the heroic struggles of the students in Spain and in Algeria.

The significance of the radicalisation and of the revolutionary character of the activity of the masses of students around the world cannot be under-estimated. It is not that students form a "layer apart", which can settle its own problems alone and in that way "set an example" to the working class. This illusion developed frequently in the petty bourgeois tops of the student movement; the reactionary policy of the bureaucratic apparatuses

fostered it, and it doomed the students' struggle to ending in blind alleys and adventures. The political pressure which throughout the world brought the students into violent opposition to every reactionary force is the expression of the rising tensions which are tearing society apart, in one layer, the particular situation of which makes it particularly sensitive. It is a harbinger of great class confrontations.

Moreover, it is one moment in the mobilisation, in the entry into struggle of all the working-class youth, of those young generations who are educating themselves for struggle in the conditions of the crisis of imperialism and of the bureaucracy. In this sense, they are a component of the general struggle of the working class.

The struggle of the French students takes its place in this international movement; the experiences of this international struggle were to be present in their struggle.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO STUDY FOR THE RIGHT TO LIVE

The government decided to strike at the beginning of May in order to cut short a militant movement arising in the student sector. The students had given evidence of their will to struggle in their refusal to accept the Fouchet Plan.

The regime fully revealed its aims in the matter of education in the Fouchet Reform as its adaptation to the needs of French capitalism for skilled manpower. In other words, to quote the formula of Capelle, Rector of the University, "To make the University a profitable enterprise", which, as the high dignitary went on to say, means "cutting out two-thirds waste", that is, more than 300,000 students.

The explicit aim of the reform is, therefore, a massive elimination of students from the University. For capitalism, there are too many workers in the factories, there are too many peasants on the land and there are also too many students in the faculties.

The general line of technical development, the complexity and the growing diversification of the economy which in highly industrialised countries tend to result in a growing part of the working class being drawn into intellectual tasks - and therefore pre-supposes that a larger layer of highly qualified workers will be formed. Let us say in passing that, having said this, it does not diminish "the importance of the working class", as a number of idiots would have us believe, but tends to make it more homogeneous, because those categories of workers who in the past could have developed illusions about their "social position" are today placed in conditions of exploitation and of work more and more identical with those experienced by the working class in general. At the same time the needs of capitalism oblige it to develop "the reserve army" of the unemployed and to organise technical changes which make certain skills valueless - especially hitting at the most highly-qualified of the wage-earners.

In this way, higher studies become more and more indispensable for the acquisition of a "skilled trade", there can only be more and more students and, inevitably, at the same time, the outlets offered to the growing mass of students are more and more reduced.

This is the contradiction which dominated the student sector. Not only are students as a layer particularly sensitive to the tensions which form in bourgeois society and, as Trotsky wrote:

"The petty bourgeois youth, feeling that an explosive force is accumulating among the masses, tends to find in its own way the way out of this blind alley and to push political development further forward".

Not only because they are young do they want to affirm their right to live and not to exist in serving capitalist society, but still more because this will "to push political development forward" finds a point of practical support in the fact that the student body as a whole is directly and immediately threatened by the general plans of capital to destroy them and make their skills un-wanted.

They reject this; they want to study. It is their struggle for the right to study and their resistance to this one aspect of the anti-working class offensive of the bourgeoisie, that the activity of the students comes to co-incide with that of the whole working class.

In order to mobilise their resistance, the students had at their disposal an instrument, a

union, the National Union of the Students of France (U.N.E.F.)

THE PLACE OF THE U.N.E.F. IN THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

The student movement had been able to free itself from "corporatism" in the conditions created at the end of World War 2 by the upturn of the working class and the positions which it had won at that time. It had been able to define its role as the trade union of the young intellectual workers, whose specific demands were bound up with the problems of the workers' movement as a whole.

Thanks to this fact, the U.N.E.F. - despite the weaknesses of its leadership - was able, as the relevant trade union, to play a positive role on several occasions for the working class and the youth in general. In particular it is to the U.N.E.F. that is owed the first mass demonstration against the war in Algeria to be organised after De Gaulle came to power, the demonstration of October 27, 1960, with which the trade union of metal-workers associated with the C.G.T. was involved.

To destroy the U.N.E.F. moreover had always since then been one of the aims of the regime. Direct attack (support of organisations opposed to the U.N.E.F., financial pressures, etc) was accompanied by attempts to disorganise it, facilitated by deficiencies of its leadership, which for some years had been tied to the P.S.U. Its leadership refused to pose the question of student demands in relation to the general struggle of the working class - which would have brought it into opposition to the controlling apparatuses of the workers' movement - and took refuge in the fiction that student problems could be resolved within the framework of the University alone. Moreover, at the moment when the students were experiencing the fate which the bourgeoisie and their state were reserving for them, their trade union organisation was unable to put any life into their struggle and was on the contrary threatened with collapse.

THE DEFENCE OF THE U.N.E.F. AND THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS

A political vanguard which, since 1961, had been organised in the Liaison Committee of Revolutionary students (C.L.E.R.), set itself the primary task of defending the U.N.E.F. Defending the U.N.E.F. meant first of all ensuring the means of struggle.

The revolutionary students pointed out the road at the Congress held in Lyon in July 1967; that of the unity of the struggles of students and those undertaken by the youth and the workers as a whole, the road of the United Front. They were able to get accepted the slogan of a students' central demonstration in Paris in front of the Ministry of National Education and in the provinces in front of the offices of the Prefects, at the same time as a resolution on defence of Social Security and of the Students' Mutual Assurance Scheme, by a demonstration organised by the U.N.E.F. and the workers' trade union centres.

The series of demonstrations which marked the visits of Peyrefitte to all the university cities, the demonstration in Paris on November 9, of 5,000 students, prepared for this perspective to be realised and mobilised the students. At Caen, Nantes, Montpellier, Nanterre, Nancy, the students had to confront the forces of repression. Finally the U.N.E.F. and the Federation of University Residents (F.R.U.F.) decided to hold a demonstration on March 14 in front of the Ministry.

But in fact the National Bureau of the U.N.E.F. refused to prepare it; on March 13 no one knew where it was to start. In the end, 5,000 students gather at the Wine Market and marched on the Ministry. But the conditions in which the demonstration had been prepared forced the demonstrators to yield the street to the heavy police forces which barred their route.

This dereliction of duty by the National Bureau was to be the occasion for a preventive operation mounted by the bourgeoisie with the complicity of the leadership of the French Communist Party, aimed primarily at the revolutionary students but which definitively also threatened the U.N.E.F.

A PREVENTIVE OPERATION

On March 17 there was a meeting of the General Assembly of U.N.E.F. The C.L.E.R. called on students to attend in the largest possible numbers to demand an accounting from the Bureau. The latter made a deal with the Stalinists: the Assembly was to meet in the town hall at Colombes, a Communist municipality, under the protection of a body of stewards provided by the centre of the Communist Party. Contrary to the usual practice, the meeting was held in private. Regularly mandated delegates, supporters of the C.L.E.R., opposed this decision

but respected it from the moment when it was adopted. At no moment did the militants of the C.L.E.R. attempt to force their way in. The militants of the C.L.E.R., who were many and disciplined, effectively stayed outside the meeting hall. Their presence was the sole guarantee that freedom of speech would be respected inside, where the Stalinist elements were mounting more and more provocations when they saw that the strong-arm men of the apparatus could not dominate the scene.

The Stalinist mayor of Colombes then summoned a detachment of police to clear the surroundings of the town hall; Seeing the situation created by the intervention of the police, the general associations of students from Besancon and from Clermont-Ferrand, of the higher students and technicians, from Nanterre and from groups of literature students in the Sorbonne, left the meeting.

After this episode, the press let rip. Moreover - a fact which is not without its ironic flavour when you know what actually happened later on - it was the leadership of U.N.E.F. which gave the signal, by a declaration adopted by those who continued the meeting under the double protection of the Stalinist apparatus and the "forces of order".

"Le Monde" (March 20)

U.N.E.F.: THE LIAISON COMMITTEE OF REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS AN ACT OF TERRORISM

"Numerous incidents have been happening lately in Paris, notably at U.N.E.F. and the Students' Mutual Assurance, provoked by the students of C.L.E.R.: offices have been broken into, student meetings systematically sabotaged, physical pressure put on the leaders to obtain changes in agreed documents or in the composition of electoral lists, and blows exchange... Last Thursday, the militants of C.L.E.R. demanded, at the general meeting of the Paris section of the Mutual Assurance that the delegates of the National Federation of Students of France, who normally are present, should leave the meeting; they then demanded that the elections to be held for the leading bodies be cancelled because they had not been able to get a decision to suit them.

At the general meeting of U.N.E.F., held on Sunday at Colombes, the militants of C.L.E.R. who were present in force, left the hall, a large body of stewards having been provided by the Communist Party.

The C.L.E.R. is close to the Lambert group, which came out of a split in the Trotskyist Fourth International, and to militants of 'Ecole Emancipee' within the Federation of National Education. Its slogans are concerned with struggle against all bureaucracies and with organising street demonstrations with workers. It participates in editing the periodical 'Revoltes'".

"Combat" (March 20)

"THE FARCE AT COLOMBES": by J.-Jacques Guillet

"In order to escape from the Trotskyists of the Liaison Committee of Revolutionary Students (belonging to the 'Revoltes' group), who wanted to take over the leadership of U.N.E.F., the Bureau of U.N.E.F. decided to go into exile.

We no longer witness general meetings of U.N.E.F., but farces. Farces that would make one laugh if they did not conceal the deep interests of students. No one talked about that: there was not time. Moreover, was it not completely forgotten, like also the question whether the U.N.E.F. is really representative? Only 170 mandates in all were recognised as valid, while the politically uncommitted Paris associations by themselves would have had 300 if they had not been arbitrarily suspended. It is time that the students put an end to this masquerade and were informed about how their representatives treat them."

"L'Humanite" (March 19)

"The Trotskyists of the Liaison Committee of Revolutionary Students, who have recently carried out a number of physical attacks on democratic students' organisations, wanted to prevent the meeting of this General Assembly of U.N.E.F. They got together some dozens of their 'shock troops' in the front of the meeting place, but the militants of U.N.E.F., mobilised to defend their union, kept them at a distance and the proceedings

went ahead normally. Moreover a resolution was carried unanimously by the General Assembly, denouncing publicly the activities and methods of the C.L.E.R. against the student movement and the workers' trade unions."

THE CONDITIONS FOR REPRESSION

The bourgeoisie made no mistake about the importance of the struggles of the students. Nor was it mistaken about the importance of the regroupment of a political vanguard among the students, any more than the Stalinists were.

The joint campaign of the "quality press" and "L'Humanite" created the conditions for repression. "Violent", "irresponsible" students were consigned to the public vengeance. The Stalinist apparatus threw all its weight into isolating them from the general body of workers and by denouncing them as "left-ists" it not only endorsed but directly called for repression of the most advanced elements of the movement.

The conditions for repression were created in this way. Fascist groups were to be able to provoke and the state to strike.

The general reaction of the bourgeoisie, with the support of the Stalinist apparatus, is to be explained by the combativity of the students. It had to be expressed politically in an organised way, and its linkages ensured with the struggles of every layer of the working class and of the youth.

To meet the needs of the activity, the Federation of Revolutionary Students was founded in Paris on April 27 and 28, 1968: it was banned on June 12. The formation conference brought together 200 delegates representing about 1,000 students (Besides Paris, where every faculty was represented, the delegates came from eighteen university cities).

The F.E.R. did not rise up as the result of a mere "proclamation", but as the outcome of the struggles in which the revolutionary militants intervened: it brought together the past activity of the C.L.E.R. with that of the militants who had come together in the committees to struggle against the Fouchet Plan.

As a political organisation, the F.E.R. could not possibly formulate its purposes in terms of "purely" student needs. It was the organised expression, in the student milieu, of the activity carried out for constructing a revolutionary youth organisation, bringing together the young manual and intellectual workers in the struggle for socialism.

But, to be precise, it could not play this role without struggling on its own territory, that of the resistance of the students, who rejected being destroyed, defended their right to study and to acquire skills and, in this struggle, joined the general body of working-class youth: F.E.R. defended the students' trade union organisation, the U.N.E.F. They did not do so in order to transform it into a Federation of Revolutionary Students, as a Figaro journalist, Papillon, mendaciously claimed - but as the mass organisation able to bring the students together in struggle. By fighting for the central youth demonstration, the F.E.R. opened a political perspective, in fighting for the united front, for the student movement, which, if it were left isolated, was doomed to frustration, of the construction of a revolutionary youth organisation.

This frustration was revealed in happenings like those at the Faculty at Nanterre.

It would be a complete illusion to think that the student movement could develop without confusion, without politically retrograde tendencies appearing within in. As an oppressed layer of the petty bourgeoisie, the student youth is very directly subject to the pressures of the dominant class and of its ideology. It can emancipate itself only by the political struggle which integrates it in the general struggle which the working class carries on for the socialist emancipation of society.

The counter-revolutionary policy of the apparatuses which controlled the workers' movement at the time was a factor which determined the incorrect orientation of those students and groups which declared that the working class was not "revolutionary", or which saw no possibility of unification of the struggles, went back to the old illusions of populism about "exemplary actions, which were to "electrify the working class", or which still were constructing plans for a utopian "revolution" in the university institution by itself. What these tendencies said for themselves did not in any way impair their effect of demobilising the movement. To swallow up the struggle of the students in a "litigation" with the educational establishment, and to offer to the students the mirage of a "critical university", a "free" oasis in the

miserable desert of "industrial society", is really nothing but repeating sugar-sweet homilies about the possibility of a "democratic reform" of the University within the framework of capitalist society, under cover of a vocabulary of revolutionary vigour.

This was the road to nowhere down which certain people wanted to lead the student movement. Among them was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, which quickly acquired a certain "public" renown, because during April he was interviewed on Radio Luxemburg, and who was one of the initiators of the so-called "March 22 movement". This was so-called because on March 22 some student militants had occupied the administrative buildings of the Faculty at Nanterre, in order to protest against the arrest of members of the Viet Nam national committee.

In the course of the development of the struggle, these tendencies were to play an important role, thanks to the policy of the leaderships of the working class and to the weakness of the vanguard. However, we have to emphasise that the place which this "critical" and "confrontational" activity occupies was far from being decisive, as has been claimed by the bourgeois press, which was concerned to high-light something which in the long run did not threaten its rule.

But, as "Informations Ouvrieres" explained on May 4, in the context of the explosive situation which had arisen among the students, even that activity could not be tolerated:

"The elemental violence of the young, if it directs itself towards 'structural reforms', is certain to be condemned as violence by the bourgeois state. But the essential point, in this case, is that the anger of the youth is not concentrated against the bourgeois state. Thus, the bourgeoisie has tolerated activities of the 'Critical University' type within the Faculty at Nanterre, while it could contain them. But these activities are themselves tending to develop to the level of general problems of the state. This is why, after they have tried to promote the greater possible confusion, the time for repression has come."

On April 27, on the basis of a put-up job, (there had been attacks on American premises in Paris), Daniel Cohn-Bendit was arrested - and, moreover, almost immediately released. The F.E.R. which had just been founded, immediately reacted. It widely distributed a leaflet:

"REPRESSION IS TRYING TO ENTRAP YOU... Students, men and women, you are all concerned."

In this leaflet, the F.E.R. called for struggle to defend democratic liberties, and proposed to the U.N.E.F. and the student political organisations that a protest meeting be called immediately as a first response. At the same time it clearly differentiated itself from the orientation of Cohn-Bendit. The F.E.R. declared in this way that it was faithful to the vital principle of revolutionary politics: against bourgeois repression, democratic liberties for every tendency in the workers' movement must be unconditionally defended. This common defence becomes no more than a trap if each tendency fails to continue the struggle for its own policies. (This leaflet is reproduced in the annexe, Document No. 1).

None the less, the repression sharpened. Seven students at Nanterre, one of whom was Michel Pourny, a member of the national committee of the F.E.R., were summoned before the Disciplinary Council. Grappin, the Dean, closed Nanterre "indefinitely". (See in the annexe, Document 2, the declaration of Michel Pourny before the Disciplinary Council).

Fascist elements set fire to the office of the Federation of the Study Groups in Literature. "Occident" called for the student militants to be murdered.

These are the conditions in which U.N.E.F. called a protest meeting at the Sorbonne on Friday, May 3.

THE STALINIST APPARATUS GIVES THE "GREEN LIGHT" THE GOVERNMENT GOES OVER TO THE ATTACK

Page one of "L'Humanite" carried a head-line on Friday, May 3: "The Faculty at Nanterre Closed from Today". On page 6, we find the declaration of Dean Grappin, and this comment:

"So the activities of the pseudo-revolutionary groups - which we have never ceased to condemn - have resulted in a decision which greatly harms the mass of the students."

On the front page, on the contrary, there is the beginning of a long article by Georges Marchais, member of the Political Bureau of the PCF, entitled: "False revolutionaries to be unmasked".

"The small left-ist groups are agitating everywhere. Not content with their agitation in

student circles - agitation which is contrary to the interests of the mass of students and favours fascist provocations - we now see these pseudo-revolutionaries claiming to give lessons to the workers' movement... These false revolutionaries must be energetically unmasked, because, objectively, they serve the interests of the Gaullist power."

And Marchais ended:

"That is why we must combat and completely isolate all the leftist small groups."

The leadership of the PCF here gives its approval of repression and directly calls for it. It assures the regime that the immense strength of its apparatus will be used to isolate the students. The government could go over to the attack. The police went into the Sorbonne and the University was closed.

The plans of the State are clear. They wanted to break the back of the student movement and, at the same time, to deliver a sharp warning to every section of the working people, workers and peasants alike. This is what is waiting for you if you try to defend your demands, to oppose the requirements of capital!

But things did not work out as they were expected. The response of the students who had been fighting was a new factor. We have emphasised the succession of struggles which had prepared for this response, the political intervention which had nourished it. It expressed a deep movement, which was going to get deeper and to grow in size.

On the evening of May 3, the U.N.E.F. sent out an order for a general strike in all the universities. The S.N.E.Sup. (National Union of Higher Education) associated itself with it.

The petty-bourgeois elements of the Cohn-Bendit type had been shouting that the trade unions were "outdated". "The unions are brothels and the U.N.E.F. is a whore", had been written by them on the walls at Nanterre. Yet, as soon as the real struggle began, the U.N.E.F. recovered all its importance, despite the hesitations and the weaknesses of its leadership. Its responsible intervention, as a students' union organisation, made the struggle against repression the business of the mass of students, and at the same time challenged the workers' organisations to face their responsibilities. It was the means of mobilising the students at the same time as it enabled a genuine struggle for the united front to take place.

Starting from this real situation, the F.E.R. and "Revoltes" distributed widely on the morning of May 4 a leaflet addressed to workers and the youth:

"OUR LIBERTIES ARE THE SAME AS YOURS"

(The leaflet is reproduced in the annexe, Document No. 3)

WHAT WAS AT STAKE

The Charter of Grenoble in 1946 declared: "There are no student problems, but student aspects of general problems". Twenty-four hours of confrontation had been enough for the "general problem" in question to be posed clearly. How far would the police state go today against the students, against any or every category of workers, along the road of arbitrary rule and repression?

The answer: they would go ALL THE WAY, if the united working class did not show itself.

On the Saturday, May 4, the state had its hands free. It decided to sharpen the repression. The tone was set by Figaro, which spoke of the demonstrators in the following terms: "These people students? They make you think of Borstall more than the University". And Figaro was listened to, to prove it. The Universities might be closed, but the police courts were not. They hastily called up the judges (beautiful samples of the independence of the magistracy). Two batches of demonstrators, caught in the act, were "dealt with". Two were given suspended sentences and four were sentenced to two months in jail. That is what is called making an example.

It is true that the state could feel itself encouraged, with the apparatus of the PCF playing its role. There was a fine photograph of a demonstration on the front page of "L'Humanite" - a demonstration in Madrid. Moreover, it was the only daily paper which did not have a single word on its front page about what had happened on Friday night. On the contrary, on page 4, it firmly denounced the students.

Georges Bouvard wrote notably:

"How can we describe those who have provoked this situation by their irresponsible activities, their violence and their insults... The students are in a position to check where the Government ultimately finds its best allies".

Bouvard, that wise adviser, went on:

"To be a revolutionary does not mean playing at insurrection, but working to impose these great changes which will enable the democratic University to be built."

Close by, on the same page, is a joint declaration by the Paris Federation of the PCF and the Union of Communist Students, and a declaration by the Communist municipality of Nanterre. These are practically identical. Both alike they say re-assuringly that "The left-ist leaders are making governmental shortcomings their excuse and staking their attempt to block the functioning of the faculties on the discontent of the students". It was the small groups which had besieged and closed Nanterre and the Sorbonne; would you believe it? But the policy of the PCF was revealed here without make-up: if "shortcomings" were all that mattered then it would be enough for them to be made good for all to be well.

However, the leaderships of the trade union organisations remained silent. The issue of "Informations Ouvrieres" which appeared on May 6 stressed how much was at stake:

"Every militant, every worker should be aware of what is at stake today.

The Gaullist regime, which was formed on May 13, now at the moment of its tenth anniversary is taking another step towards a police state by its repression of the students.

Social Security is being dismantled and the decrees which have been issued up until now represents only the beginning of the measures which are necessary to French capitalism. In order to make these measures effective, they must attack the workers' movement and take back forcibly from the workers' the liberties which enable them to organise in order to defend themselves.

This is what the repression against the students foreshadows. For the first time since 1940 a government has dared to repeat what Petain and the Gestapo did: to close the Sorbonne and to put police into it.

Breaking the traditional freedoms of the universities by savagely repressing the students demonstrations, the state shows that it intends to impose the "order" necessary for exploitation to proceed, and how it intends to treat every category of workers, if the united resistance of the working class does not prevent it.

The most elementary democratic liberties are in question. They lie who say that the students are defending particular interests. Their fight for the right to study is part of the general fight against poverty and decay. When they fight police repression, they are defending the liberties of all the workers.

We should organise joint resistance against an attack directed at us all, to defend democratic liberties, to oppose police repression, to unite workers and students, to unite the U.N.E.F., the workers' unions and those of the teachers.

For a central demonstration of workers, youth and students, to make the government retreat."

MONDAY, MAY 6
CALLED OUT BY THE U.N.E.F.
THE HUGE RESPONSE OF THE STUDENTS
TRANSFORMS THE SITUATION

In this situation a crushing responsibility weighed on the U.N.E.F. The state could concentrate the attack on it. The attitude of the leaders of the P.C.F. and of the C.G.T, though they did not convince the workers that the students were "provocateurs", made any immediate reaction by the majority of the working class impossible, and spread confusion among the militants.

When the U.N.E.F. had to join a battle on which much more than its own fate depended, it was to all intents and purposes isolated. To be sure, the speed and the scope of the reaction of the students on the Friday forced the leadership into the struggle at the same time as they convinced their leaders that struggle was possible. But, once the order to strike had gone out, several dangers threatened to abort the resistance which was beginning to get organised.

The leadership of the U.N.E.F. could use its isolation as a pretext for a platonic protest, while it waited for its isolation to be broken, and could avoid really struggling against the repression by rejecting practical defence of the right to demonstrate. But its isolation could be broken only by struggle, by massive mobilisation of the students. To wait would be to enable the government to strike still harder.

Or, accepting its isolation, the U.N.E.F. could lead the students into a struggle which, though perhaps heroic, was without perspective, at a time when the situation demanded that the U.N.E.F. declare the situation to be serious and call on the organisations of the workers, the working people and the youth to struggle.

At this stage, the leadership of the U.N.E.F. faced its responsibilities. The immediate, determined resistance of the students, combined with the intervention of the militants of the F.E.R., who agreed with the leaders of the U.N.E.F. on the forms of action to be undertaken, explains this fact. It demonstrates the reality of an orientation based on the United Front, and proves that there is nothing formal in defining the U.N.E.F. as a trade union. It emphasises that its leaders did not constitute an "apparatus" in the sense in which that term can be used about the reformist or Stalinist leaderships, that the U.N.E.F. leadership could develop. It confirmed the correctness of the line which had been followed for years by the revolutionary students in opposition to all other currents.

The U.N.E.F. appealed to the population to take part on a large scale in the demonstration which it was organising for Monday, May 6. At the same time it invited the unions of the workers and teachers to organise in struggle with them. Moreover - and this is by no means a detail - while the demonstration was initially meant for 9 o'clock in the morning, which would inevitably have confined it to students alone - it was called for half past six in the evening at Denfert-Rochereau.

The U.N.E.F. expressed itself in a leaflet which is reproduced below. This was handed out on a large scale in work-places, particularly by the militants of the F.E.R., supported by the workers' vanguard gathered round "Informations Ouvrieres".

APPEAL TO THE POPULATION

Police violence savagely repressed the students on the evening of May 3: 593 arrests and hundreds of wounded. Like the workers at CAEN and elsewhere, passers-by were ferociously repressed.

In fact their struggle is fundamentally the same. The workers reject the society which exploits them and the students reject a university which aims to make them the docile cadres of a system founded on exploitation, and even sometimes direct accomplices in this exploitation.

The reactionary press tries to present the movement of the students as a revolt of privileged young people and tries to cut us off from our natural allies. The bourgeoisie in fact knows that it is by the side of the working people, and by their side alone, that the students can be victorious. In opposition to this wall of lies, the students have to make known to the people the purpose of their struggles.

The bourgeoisie are trying to isolate and to divide the movement: the response must be immediate.

This is why:

The U.N.E.F. proposes to the unions of teachers and workers that the unity process which has actually taken place during the demonstrations be continued. Workers, school students and students together responded spontaneously with the U.N.E.F. in the face of police aggression.

Down with police repression

Down with the reactionary press

Down with the bourgeois university

GENERAL STRIKE ON MONDAY

and until all our comrades are set free. Take part en masse in the demonstration in the Latin Quarter at 6.30 on Monday.

Students! Organise in your faculties in U.N.E.F. rank and file committees

with the students in struggle against the police state was growing.

On May 4 the militants of the Paris region of the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste and of the co-ordination committees for unity with the militants of "Revoltes" and of the F.E.R. began to work for this solidarity to be expressed in a central demonstration, called by the trade unions and the parties claiming to represent the class. It is not to adverti them that we mention only these militants. After all, what counts first is the policy defended and not the degree of "activity". But it is a fact that at this stage they were th only people to be carrying on this fight. None of the groups or organisations which claim to be for the socialist revolution were taking part in it at the time. They were to act inside workplaces and trade unions with wide distributions of leaflets.

On the morning of May 6, it was militants of the F.E.R. who handed out the appeal of the U.N.E.F. at the gates of the big factories in the Paris region, like Renault. The trade union "leading figures" tried to start provocations, but ran into the refusal of the workers to back them. None the less, the workers asked: Is action possible? Where is the action leading that the students have started. The demonstrations of May 6 gave the answer, and on the 7th the atmosphere began to change in the workplaces and the factories. It was possible to fight, and the fight which the students were putting up was the fight of the workers.

Political discussions with the militant students began. It was not a question of two "work meetings, that of the universities and of the factories. It was a question simply of finding the means to unify the common struggle.

By their resistance the students mobilised and unified a whole sector of the youth involved in class struggle, the student sector. They set it into confrontation with the state. Without any exaggeration we can say that this struggle - even if the weight of the student sector was, to be sure, less decisive by itself - had for the workers in general the same significance as the strike of the miners. The miners won a breathing space for the whole working class to get organised. In the situation in which the student struggle unfolded, it opened a road to action for the whole working class.

This is what, for example, is explained in the leaflet distributed at Nantes on May 7 by the militants of "Revoltes" and of "Informations Ouvrieres", within the framework of preparing the day of action against unemployment organised for May 8 by the unions throughout the departments of the West of France. The leaflet reads:

The beating with truncheons of the students in the Latin Quarter means the introduction of a police state.

DOWN WITH THE SPECIAL COURTS AT CAEN AND IN PARIS

Departmental unions in Loire-Atlantique have called a 24 hour general strike for May 8.

This day of action should be the stage of preparing for a general strike of workers, students and teachers.

Against the truncheon regime
Against low wages and unemployment

The workers' organisations and the students' union must accept their responsibilities.

The strike of the students can be successful only in unity with that of the workers and peasants.

WORKERS AND STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE

May 8 at 3 pm

Place de la Duchesse Anne

Shoulder to shoulder, reply massively to the attack of the government and of the employers.

Negotiate agreements now
End the Repression
Stop the Beatings
Immediately free the imprisoned students
Cancel the prison sentences
Not a single sacking

AFTER CAEN, PARIS CAME NEXT
THE PREFECT MUST GIVE HIS WORD.

No Unemployment!
No Dictatorship!

May 7, 1968

"Revoltes" - "Informations Ouvrieres"
Federation of Revolutionary Students
Nantes Workers' Co-ordinating Committee.

The resistance of the students served to encourage the whole class to mobilise. This is what made the government be cautious and hesitate. The apparatuses could not go on obstructing the aspirations of the workers and their will not to leave the students isolated - except on certain conditions. To intensify the repression was at the same time to strengthen this will and threaten to blow up the dam which the bureaucratic apparatuses erected. But to give way meant opening the way for the struggle to become general and recognising that it pays off to struggle.

CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE

On May 6 the U.N.E.F. had fully integrated the struggle of the students in the class struggle when they mobilised the mass of students against the attack of the regime. To continue the struggle, to go towards mobilising the workers in general, to open the way to the United Front, this meant first of all following up the activity of the mass of students. At the same time it was clear that the students by themselves could not go beyond certain limits. The occupation by the police of the Sorbonne focussed the authority of the bourgeois state. This was one point on which the government would not give way. The forces of repression occupying the Latin Quarter would not let themselves be caught unprepared again.

Those who reasoned in purely "military" terms found themselves in confusion. At an inter-organisational meeting on May 7, the anarchists proposed a "mini-manifestation", to baffle the repression. The Pro-Chinese elements in the Union of Communist Youth (Marxist-Leninists) demanded that one should go "to the people", in the form of dispersion in the areas where workers lived. However, precisely what made possible joining the students' struggle with the working class was that, on its own territory, it really existed. To continue the struggle meant to develop further the mobilisation of the students, who were already being joined in increasing numbers by other young people, to develop their organisation and the rise in their consciousness by a political struggle. This struggle would imply demonstrations and mass meetings. But it would not be reduced to an automatic confrontation with the forces of repression, irrespective of the situation and of the relations of forces.

The U.N.E.F. was correct, on Tuesday, May 7, to call another demonstration at Denfert-Rochereau, on the basis of the slogans which were the pre-condition for any negotiations:

1. An end to all charges against students in administrative, judicial or university courts. Cases being heard to be dropped. The imprisoned students to be liberated.
2. Police forces to be withdrawn from University premises and their neighbourhoods.
3. The closure of University premises to be ended.

The S.N.E.Sup (for the university teachers), through the person of its general secretary, M. Geismar, announced that it was playing no part in this demonstration: "The great majority of teachers is not ready to demonstrate every day. We do not want to have an escalad all the time".

ONE SINGLE FLAG, THE RED FLAG

A formidable police concentration completely surrounded the Latin Quarter. The demonstration which gathered at Denfert-Rochereau could not force its way in. But the government did not seek a clash. For fear of the reaction in the working class, they allowed the demonstration to go ahead.

Correctly the demonstration turned itself into a long march. It went first to Montparnasse station and then to the Invalides. It showed how strong it was, and grew by the minute. Soon there were sixty thousand demonstrators. There was a majority of youth, but there

The mass mobilisation of the workers could come about only through their organisations and, particular, through their trade unions. To work for the United Front means working within the organisations of the working class, to express and to impose there the aspirations of the working people, and that means a struggle to dispute the question with the bureaucratic apparatuses.

The leaders of the U.N.E.F. were linked politically to the P.S.U. and were incapable of taking this battle on. They were panicked by their own members who were demanding explanations and had not hesitated on March 17 at Colombes to appeal to the Stalinist apparatus, which was later to try to strangle the U.N.E.F. They were carried on a movement which they did not control and, at the beginning, had taken a position which was correct and of considerable importance. This by no means meant that they could hold to a correct orientation. The intervention of the revolutionary cadres had been decisive for the positions which the leaders of the U.N.E.F. had taken on the eve of May 6. But that intervention took place in social circumstances: the governmental provocation was forcing the U.N.E.F. either to capitulate unconditionally - which meant its disappearance - or to struggle. Every link with the bourgeois state was in a certain sense broken. The attitude of the apparatuses also was leading to a real break between them and the leaders of U.N.E.F.

But starting on May 8, its contacts with the leaderships of the workers' movement were renewed. The conditions for a renewed "dialogue" with the government re-appeared. The leadership of U.N.E.F. came under new pressures, which it was unable to resist.

Their failure to understand the role of the state led them to illusions about its manoeuvres. The fact that the domination of the bureaucratic apparatuses over the workers' movement seemed to them to be "legitimate" and inevitable led them to avoid the activity to mobilise the whole class which was now directly on the agenda.

The opportunism and adventurism which resulted were to be encouraged and strengthened by all those currents which claim to be Marxists and revolutionaries (Revolutionary Communist Youth, supporters of Mandel and Frank, etc.) have always adapted to the apparatuses and formed their left wing and have revised the very bases of revolutionary policy (revolutionary role of the proletariat, international character of the class struggle, necessity for the party).

On May 8 there was a debate in the Parliament. Peyrefitte had the job of preparing the retreat of the government, a retreat which was now necessary in order to avoid the link-up with the working class. But at this stage the state still had control of the situation and did not intend to retreat except on certain conditions. Anyone who believed the statements of Peyrefitte about the possibilities of re-opening the Sorbonne if order were restored to mean that it was to be handed over immediately to the students "without strings" was preparing to dupe the students or to drive them into adventures.

In the course of a press conference, Geismar declared in the afternoon: "Liberated by the police or not, tonight the Sorbonne will belong to us, students and teachers". We cannot imagine for a single instant that Geismar had in mind an assault on the Sorbonne. The "overtures" which the government was already making, what we might call the "pre-negotiations" which were taking place in response to the pleadings of the university circles, made him anticipate that the government would surrender immediately and let the Sorbonne be immediately re-opened.

In the evening of May 8 a meeting was called at the Halle aux Vins, on the fringe of the Latin Quarter, which was still occupied by masses of police. Twenty thousand people came to this meeting. The support of the trade union leaderships was marked in particular by the presence of the representative of the S.N.E.T.P.-C.G.T., who got booed. After the meeting a procession formed and went along the Boulevard St. Germain, then going up to the Luxembourg. The government continued to retreat: the Latin Quarter, which the previous day had been a "forbidden territory" saw thousands of students, of youth and of teachers march in. But the Sorbonne was still a police fortress. The procession which had had no object other than to break into it by force had no longer any aim. It tended to run wild, to become disorganised, while numerous students who took Geismar seriously were thinking about attacking the police.

The U.N.E.F. leadership ran away from its responsibilities and vanished. It was at that point that a leader of the F.E.R., responsibly, called on the demonstration to disperse. This was a political decision, which the following facts made necessary:

1. The "recovery" of the Sorbonne continued to be a political objective, and not merely a symbol, because the authority of the bourgeois state depended on its being occupied. This was precisely why it could not be liberated without the working class coming on the scene, and not by the action of the students alone.
2. The way forward to that action now lay open thanks to the struggle of the students.
3. There could be no question of leaving part of the students to get themselves massacred uselessly. Nor could there be any question of letting the demonstration break up in disorder.

On the following day, May 9, the F.E.R. distributed a leaflet: "THE FIGHT GOES ON". In agitational terms, this perfectly sums the problem up:

The National Bureau of the Federation of Revolutionary Students declares:

THE FIGHT GOES ON

The government fears that the students and the working class may join hands.

Last Monday, the government savagely beat the students, but the students fought.

On Tuesday, the government could not prevent 50,000 workers and students from holding the streets for six hours, but the government closed off the Latin Quarter.

On Wednesday evening, the students marched into the Latin Quarter. Struggle pays off, but nothing has been won.

The U.N.E.F. appealed to the trade union confederations to organise a central demonstration.

WORKERS AND STUDENTS! LET US FIGHT TOGETHER

The F.E.R. appeals to the workers to hold their meetings everywhere, to stop work, to demonstrate and to prepare the central demonstration of the students and the workers, for a joint victory over the government.

The U.N.E.F. must appeal to all the workers and their organisations to

DEMONSTRATE ON SATURDAY, MAY 11

AT THREE PM

AT DENFERT-ROCHEREAU

For: Liberation of the Imprisoned Students
Police Forces to be Withdrawn
The Faculties to be Re-Opened

Against: Discrimination

Take part in the MEETING of the F.E.R.
on Friday, May 10 at 8.30 pm.
at the Mutualité

In this way the F.E.R. fought for the formation in the student milieu of an organised political leadership such as the struggle for linkage with the working class made necessary - that is, realising the Workers' United Front - necessary for the struggle against the bourgeois state. This is what earned for the F.E.R. the hatred of all the adversaries of Marxism, all the enemies of "organisation", that is, all who rejected or feared the revolutionary activity of the proletariat.

500,000 WORKERS IN THE LATIN QUARTER

May 9 seemed to be an "empty" day. There were no great demonstrations and no spectacular events. Yet it was a day when the situation was coming together.

The leaderships of the workers' movement - and in particular those of the P.C.F. and the C.G.T. - could no longer oppose frontally the demand for active solidarity which was being expressed in the working class and in particular from the militants. The everlasting denunciations of the "left-ists" continued in "L'Humanite", but got less and less space in it. It head-lined: "THE GOVERNMENT UNDER INDICTMENT". The editorial writer, Georges Bovard, braved ridicule, assured that "teachers, workers' organisations and democratic parties have

At the same time it clearly conveys a respect for these apparatuses, to which it hands over the working class, because it does not advance any method for resisting the control of the apparatuses.

Because the J.C.R. refuses to defend its own proposed solutions, it leaves it to the spontaneity of the "student committees", which will decide on "future activities". In this way it resigns from the responsibilities of the political vanguard which it claims to be.

It is not surprising that at their meeting the members of the J.C.R. could do no more than echo what Cohn-Bendit said and earn his congratulations.

We quote again from "Analyses et Documents", this time the contribution of a member of the national Bureau of the J.C.R. - with which Cohn-Bendit said he agreed:

"We must reflect, think about perspectives and discuss in the University all the choices of the bourgeoisie. The working class remains the historic element which will overthrow capitalism on the world scale. The policy of the trade unions is a brake. The problems which arise today are lack of leadership and of a line - IF WE RAISE THEM NOW WE RISK BREAKING THE MOVEMENT (our underlining), we should put forward themes of agreement valid for everyone: find the forms of struggle (?). The critical University must be a process of permanent confrontation. It must have as its aim a general revolutionary organisation, because: 1. There can be no question of being towed behind the trade union leaderships; 2. The working class is a class when it opposes itself as such to the employers. In the absence of a revolutionary party, the true revolutionaries are those who fight the police. The vanguard groups correspond to revolutionary currents on the world scale. Today they must respect each others' line and correct their own while sticking to the mass movement.

The tasks:

1. Fight against repression and the threat of penalties;
2. Make progress in the field of theory (?);
3. Form Committees of struggle for propaganda and explanation in the workers' districts;
4. Organise in specific places, create an epicentre; Sorbonne, Nanterre, etc.;
5. Carry on an extra-parliamentary policy; form student committees in Paris and Nanterre."

We have taken the trouble to reproduce as a whole this magma, because it conveys in a short statement all the false orientations, all the confusions and illusions which weighed upon the struggle of the students and, as such, is an important political document.

Only the militants of the F.E.R. opposed this charter of "taulism" and of impressionism in the course of this meeting. They were to show how to continue the struggle. The aim which the development of the struggle implied, now that it had broken out, was the central demonstration of the workers and the youth; this was now on the agenda. The force represented by the students mobilised against the repression had now to be used to the full for this slogan to be realised. The struggle had to be widened still more, to be organised and co-ordinate through the formation of strike committees and of a national committee for the strike which the U.N.E.F. had started off.

FRIDAY, MAY 10

On Friday, May 10, the intransigence of the government only strengthened the possibilities of seeing, united in the streets, the workers, the youth and the students compelling it to give way. "L'Humanite" carried the head-line: "THE STRUGGLE AGAINST REPRESSION IS GROWING". Madeleine Colin, the secretary of the C.G.T., commenting on the discussions between U.N.E.F., the C.G.T. and the C.F.D.T., concluded: "In response to the U.N.E.F., which is standing up to the reactionary, anti-social policy of the Power, we have promised to promote the most quickly possible a wide movement of union between workers and students." At 8.15 in the evening these discussions ended. A joint communication, calling for joint demonstrations of workers, teachers and students, in every large city in France, for Tuesday, May 14, was issued. One question - an important one - remained unsettled. In Paris, what was to be the route of the demonstration? The leaders of the C.G.T. insisted that the procession, leaving the Place St. Michel, should go towards the Gare de l'Est - which means turn its

back on the Latin Quarter which was still occupied by the forces of repression.

THE MEETING OF THE FEDERATION OF REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS

This is the context of the meeting which had been called more than ten days before by the F.E.R. The approach of the F.E.R. was completely the opposite of that of the J.C.R. It started from the necessity to construct, through intervention in the struggle, a political leadership which expressed the general needs of the struggle, organised it and centralised it. For that purpose, a "political line" was needed, and action was needed for it to "impose its hegemony", that is, to fight on a line by the methods of workers' democracy. This was the only way to prevent the movement from being broken up.

The F.E.R. refused to place itself in the wake of petty bourgeois illusions. It acted for building, in the course of the struggle, not a "student leadership", but an organisation in the student milieu which could respond to the need for political organisation of every revolutionary struggle. It could not fail to concentrate on itself all the hostility of the adversaries of Marxism.

The combattivity of the students, the strength of their response, the radicalisation within the working class and the intervention of the vanguard placed at the head of the agenda problems which could not be solved by the struggle of the students alone

The general battle had to be organised. The linkage of the students and the working class was not the setting-up of some sort of alliance between two social forces, of which one - the students - would be the bearer of a "model" of revolutionary action, any more than they "put themselves in the service" of "the people", in subordinate functions. The linkage arose objectively from the character of the struggle of the students: it was born out of the functioning of capitalist society: far from being separated from the general struggle of the workers, it was a component of it. To express this reality political and to prepare the only possible linkage meant fighting for the workers' united front, of which the students and their organisations - and the U.M.E.F. right at the beginning - formed an indispensable element.

It was by fighting on its own ground and demonstrating there that struggle paid off that the students opened the road to struggle of the whole working class.

One result of the struggle of the students was that the leaderships of the working class were obliged to go down the road of a central demonstration. But the struggle had also raised the political problems, which were posed at such a level that they could not be settled by the activity of the students alone. The development of the movement could be nothing other than shifting it to the scale of the whole working class by realising the United Front.

This was concretely expressed by the slogan of "500,000 workers to the Latin Quarter", which was defended in the factories, ^{and} repeated in tens of thousands of leaflets, and under the sign of which the F.E.R. held their meeting.

There were numerous pressures for the meeting not to be held at all. People had noticed that on May 8 activity could not go forward as the simple repetition of identical demonstrations. They had also noticed that it was not possible to win back the Latin Quarter by the sole force of the students - except by a limited "civil war", which no one wanted. The leaders of the J.C.R. had stressed that it was equally necessary to carry on some political activity. Correctly, they wanted to hold their meeting of the 9th. The date of the 11th had been put forward at that time for preparing a powerful demonstration and for campaigning to get the workers' organisations associated with it.

However, on May 10, they called a demonstration which was by no means motivated by the need of activity. It was marked at the beginning by the large number of school students who, after having demonstrated practically the whole day, joined it. But the participation of this new layer of militants at the same time permitted the Stalinist leaders in education to re-appear and to set the framework of the demonstration.

After some people demonstrated in front of the La Sante prison, the greatest part of the procession was placed at the entry to the Latin Quarter, which was still blocked by the forces of repression. The bridges were closed off and the demonstrators found themselves again in a situation like that of May 8. Most of the demonstrators began to disperse, but thousands of students remained facing the police barricades.

that they put the students in a trap. If that had been their aim, what did the fiction of "peaceful barricades" serve? It is enough to let speak the "organisers" and a witness who was won to them:

"On Friday, in the Place Denfert-Rochereau, when the demonstration was gathering, we had a long discussion with the other organisers about what we were going to do and where we were to go. We could no longer think in terms of an ordinary procession - the students would not have understood - but neither could we deliberately seek to confront the police, because you don't send people to be slaughtered. Our idea was to occupy a place, peacefully, and to stay there until our three demands - liberation of our comrades, withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter and re-opening of the Latin Quarter - had been met.

We had thought of occupying the Palais de Justice (Law Courts), but that would have been too difficult. We had thought of closing off the Place Vendome, but that would have been a trap. Finally, we set off for the Latin Quarter, and the police let us pass. If there had been barricades, we would not have forced them, because the password was "no confrontation". We would have gone on to occupy somewhere else. In fact, the police channelled us towards the Latin Quarter.

We arrived at the Boulevard St. Michel, the students sat down on the ground and we discussed what we could do. Then, when I went back up to the top of the Boulevard, I saw that the students were beginning to pull up the paving stones. Sauvageot was there and I asked him what was going on. He told me: "They are occupying the Quarter". But no one had given the order to put up barricades. Quite simply, as soon as a few students began to make one, everyone realised that the best solution was to occupy the place peacefully."

(Daniel Cohn-Bendit: "Our May 10 Commune", in "Le Nouvel Observateur", 15 - 21 May, 1968)

"At that moment, we called upon the people to make their way as far as they could into the small streets, take positions and surround it. And, at this moment, it spread very quickly through the demonstration that in a certain number of places the people were beginning to raise defences between themselves and the C.R.S. - that is to say, to make use of branches of trees and cafe chairs. THE IDEA OF CONSTRUCTING BARRICADES SPREAD EVERYWHERE AND DEVELOPED REALLY LIKE A POWDER-TRAIN. I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT PRECISE ORDERS WERE GIVEN, by one or other political organisation to construct barricades.

When now people ask us what we thought about it, I say clearly that at the time it did not annoy me, that there had never been anything offensive about a barricade and that, no one did not take the offensive, it could in no case be dangerous, and that they called on the people - as I spent several hours doing, using a megaphone and circulating among the crowd - not to provoke incidents and not to throw things."

(Alain Geismar speaks, in "This is only a beginning", by P. Labro, pages 185 - 186)

"On May 10, when the demonstration had made its way back up the Boulevard St. Michel it began to hesitate at the Place Edmond Rostand and to move about towards 8 or 8.30 p.m. Then people started pulling up the stones and saying, 'They are attacking the Sorbonne'. I was there, a little disoriented, because I did not at all want the people to go hurling themselves at the Sorbonne or that there would be a conflict. I met a friend who is a teacher in the top class at Louis-le-Grand, called Scherer. Cohn-Bendit was quite new to us. Scherer said to me: 'You absolutely must find something to say to them so that they will not go and do stupid things', and he went over to Cohn-Bendit, who was by him and said: 'Tell them not to go into the whorehouse of a Sorbonne as long as our chaps are not freed.'

Cohn-Bendit took his loud-hailer and said that, and thousands of people heard him: 'Disperse; don't stay in groups, form your groups for discussion and action. By tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds, install yourselves everywhere. The Latin Quarter belongs to us. Go speak there, go discuss there.' Then, if you like, in this extreme dramatic moment, facing people who wanted to go over to the attack, the attack which was what he for his part regarded as the political act par excellence. It was to stand on the ground (sic) and discuss in the dynamic of a group, to talk to yourself in this world of invective and of silence."

(Alain TOURAINE speaks, in "THIS IS ONLY A BEGINNING", by P. Labro, page 42).

This was the situation in which the F.E.R., at the end of its meeting, did not "forget to come to the barricades", as the pretentious Geismar dares to say, but came to the Latin Quarter in a disciplined procession, with its banners in front, with its stewards in control, shouting the slogan "500,000 workers to the Latin Quarter". This was the situation in which the F.E.R. expressed the policy which it had defended since the struggle began. One of its leaders called on the demonstrators to organise in order to impose

a central demonstration for struggle, to prepare for the decisive stage of the movement and to bring about the conditions for a complete victory over the state. The demonstration was swollen by several thousands of youth and workers; the procession of the F.E.N. went down the Boulevard St. Michel singing the "International" and shouting the slogan "500,000 workers at the Latin Quarter"!

The incoherence of Cohn-Bendit and of those who followed him led to a situation in which the government regained the initiative in the matter of repression. They decided - a without doubt at the highest level - that there was a good opportunity to try to break the movement by a final recourse to police terror. If they handed over the encircled students to the wolf-pack of police who had long been held in check, they would also strengthen the attachment of the police forces to the state.

So, at 2.15 in the morning, the order to attack was given. One by one the barricades were forced by the use of grenades. Then towards dawn the man-hunt began, and the atrocious scenes reported through the press, the wounded being beaten and people being chased into private dwellings.

Militants of every tendency defended the barricades against the police savagery with heroic courage. But that courage is only an accusation of the political irresponsibility of those who issued the absurd notion of "peaceful barricades". To be sure, their irresponsibility could have had no effect, but for the efforts of the Stalinist apparatus to isolate the students during the decisive days. First and foremost the blame for the blood shed in the Latin Quarter is due to the Stalinist apparatus; if it had used all its influence to mobilise the working class against repression from May 3 onwards, the government would have had to give way well before May 13.

If the lessons - the full lessons - of May - June 1968 are to be drawn, the policies which the different currents defended must be clearly understood. We see nothing to add - or to withdraw - in what was written about the night of May 10 - 11 in the single issue of the organ of the F.E.R., "THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENT":

"During the night of May 10 - 11, the students and the young workers showed how high is the courage and their readiness to fight, while the Cohn-Bendits and the other petty bourgeois showed, for their part, their political bankruptcy."

* * *

None the less, the calculations of the government were to be frustrated. Terror was no longer enough, not because the bloody events of the night suddenly awoke the masses of the workers, but on the contrary because the working class had already begun to move. Indignation at the barbarity of the repression and the protests of the highest persons in the University were to speed up a process which became irresistible.

Georges Seguy, the general secretary of the C.G.T., declared:

"The C.G.T. is following with the closest attention and deep concern the grave even in the Latin Quarter... The C.G.T. protests vehemently and indignantly against the attitude of the government: if the government really wants to prevent the situation from getting worse, it must at once withdraw its police forces from the Latin Quarter, declare an amnesty for all the demonstrators who have been sentenced and take under consideration the legitimate demands of the students and of the university circles, which correspond in many points to those of the workers."

The C.G.T. summoned the workers to protest in unity and with the vigour which the situation required against the attitude of the powers, and to prepare a powerful popular response, as decided by the trade union organisations of workers, students and teachers. For this purpose, it proposed to hold an urgent meeting.

On the Saturday morning, the representatives of the C.G.T., the F.E.N., the C.F.D.T. and the U.N.E.F. met and decided on a 24 - hour general strike for Monday, May 13.

As a resolution dated May 12 of the Political Bureau of the P.C.F. was to declare - rather late - "AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM IS POSED".

The resistance of the students opened the way to class action and led to the whole class being mobilised. In opposition to repression, the workers were not only to force the state to retreat; their activity was to call into question the very foundations of the capitalist rule.