

# France 1968 Month of Revolution

"The causes lie far in the past"

The General Strike in France  
May - June 1968

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FRANCE 1968

MONTH OF REVOLUTION

by Stephane Just

"The Causes of the General Strike of May - June 1968  
lie far in the Past"

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The General Strike of May and June 1968 inflicted a mortal wound on the Fifth Republic. But it did not finish it off. Since then it has been in its death-agony. However, we have to analyse the origin, the nature and the historic function of this regime, if we are to understand why and how the Fifth Republic was mortally wounded.

De Gaulle came to power on June 1, 1958, following the insurrection of the officer-corps in Algeria and the decomposition of the Fourth Republic, as it roosted on the shoulders of Guy Mollet and the Parliamentarians. The French Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the apparatuses of the trade unions undertook to confuse the masses politically and to paralyse them.

De Gaulle was elevated to power to be the incarnation of the permanence and the leading role of the bourgeois state, of the national interest, situated above "the parties" and the classes. He was presented as "the Man of Destiny", the saviour of national unity, the "arbiter of everything", in the classical role of a Bonaparte.

THE FIFTH REPUBLIC IN THE MIRROR OF ITS CONSTITUTION

The speech which De Gaulle delivered on September 4, 1958 in the Place de la Republique, Paris, presented the new Constitution and dotted the "i's":

"We have done what had to be done to deal with what would have been irremediable, at the very moment when it was on the point of happening. The nation has rightly been prevented from tearing itself apart. We have been able to safeguard the Republic's last chance. I and my Government, by the due process of legality, have accepted the exceptional mandate, to draft a new Constitution and to submit it to the decision of the people.

We have done this on the basis of the principles which were laid down when we took over. We have done it with the co-operation of the Consultative Council which was instituted according to the law. We have done it while we took account of the solemn advice of the Council of State. We have done it after very free and very deep deliberations by our own Councils of Ministers; these Councils are made up of men from as diverse origins and tendencies as possible, but the members resolutely support each other. We have done this without, in the interim, having laid a finger on any of the people's rights or any public liberty. The nation is the sole judge; it will approve or reject our work. But we advance our proposals to the nation in full awareness of what we are doing.

The public powers must be effective and must not be interrupted. From now on this is of the utmost importance. We live in a time when gigantic forces are in the course of transforming the world. On pain of becoming a worn-out, despised people, we must make rapid progress in the scientific, economic and social domains. Furthermore, the taste for progress and the passion for technical successes, which saw the light of day among the French and first among our youth, corresponds to this imperative. These are facts which dominate our existence as a nation and must, therefore, command our institutions...

The universe is being traversed by currents which place in question the human race and which lead France to take precautions, while she plays to the full her role as a moderator, for peace and fraternity, which her vocation dictates to her. In brief, the French nation will flower again, or it will perish, according to whether the state has or does not have sufficient strength, constancy and prestige to lead it where it should go.

Therefore, it is for the people, who we are, in the age and on the world where we are, that the draft of the Constitution has been drawn up.

The country should be led effectively by those whom it mandates and to whom it gives the confidence which legitimacy inspires. There should be a national arbiter above the political struggles; he should be elected by the citizens in fulfillment of a public duty; he should have the task of ensuring that the institutions function as they should; he should have the right to appeal to the judgement of the sovereign people; he should take the responsibility for the defence of the independence, the honour and the integrity of France and the security of her people when they are in extreme danger. There should exist a government the purpose of which is to govern, which is allowed the time and the chance to govern, which devotes itself to nothing but its task and which deserves the support of the country for that reason. There should exist a Parliament the purpose of which is to represent the political will of the nation; it should vote laws and control the executive but should not go outside that function. Government and Parliament should collaborate but should retain their separate responsibilities; no member of one should at the same time be a member of the other. This is the balanced structure which the state-power should assume. The rest will depend on the men."

The Constitution of the Fifth Republic ensured that the state should be pre-eminent and that the President of the Republic should in his own person embody the executive power. Henceforth:

"Article 8: The President of the Republic nominates the Prime Minister.. He terminates his functions, when the latter presents the resignation of his government. On the proposal of the Prime Minister, the President nominates the other members of the Government and brings their functions to an end."

Furthermore, the President of the Republic is invested with certain essential state functions. His primacy and that of the Government is assured in various ways. Article 49 provides:

"When the Prime Minister addresses the National Assembly, following discussions in the Council of Ministers, he commits his government to its programme or, as may be the case, to a declaration of general policy.

The National Assembly calls into question the responsibility of the government by carrying a motion of censure. Such a motion cannot be moved unless it is signed by at least one-tenth of the members of the National Assembly. The vote can be taken only forty-eight hours after the motion is moved. The only votes to be counted are those cast in support of the motion, which can be adopted only by a majority of the National Assembly.

...If the censure motion is defeated, those who signed it may not propose another one in the course of the same session, except in the case for which the paragraph below provides.

Following discussion by the Council of Ministers, the Prime Minister may inform the National Assembly that the Government will not depart from a particular text on which the Assembly is to vote. In this case, the text will be regarded as having been carried by the Assembly unless a censure motion, moved within 24 hours, is carried as above. The Prime Minister may appeal to the Senate for a declaration of general policy to be approved."

All this means that, in the case when a censure motion is not moved or is not supported by a clear majority of the deputies in the National Assembly, the proposals of the Government are regarded as accepted. In the case in which a censure motion is carried, article 50 provides:

"When the National Assembly adopts a censure motion, or when it disapproves of the programme of the Government or of a declaration by it of general policy, the Prime Minister must hand the resignation of the Government to the President of the Republic."

But the Constitution also makes clear that, in this case, the decision lies with the President:

"Article 12: The President of the Republic may announce that the National Assembly is dissolved, after consultation with the Prime Minister and with the Speakers of the Assemblies.

General Elections take place at least twenty days and at most forty days after the dissolution."

The liquidation of the Fourth Republic and the installation of the Fifth Republic were responses to the profound needs of French imperialism. It had just suffered in Indo-China a defeat from which no recovery was possible. Since November 1, 1954, Algeria was in the grip of the revolutionary war for independence. In every colony the masses were arising or were ready to arise against the colonial regime. At the same time, French imperialism had to find a different way than before to find a place in European and world economic relations, in international division of labour, on pain of declining to the level of a fifth-rate power. The Marshall Plan had come and gone, just as the time had passed when US imperialism had subsidised the war in Indo-China. The Treaty of Rome, which had been negotiated under the Fourth Republic, had instituted the European Common Market, in line with the wishes of US imperialism. In this way, a vast zone of free exchange of commodities and of circulation of capital, in which it hoped to invest, had come into operation. French imperialism was obliged to introduce profound changes into its international relations and to establish other international relations on a new basis. But as a preliminary it was absolutely essential for French imperialism to bring the old colonialism to an end and to give political independence to its former colonies.

This was not simple, because the colonists themselves, a whole section of finance-capital and of the army and of the state-apparatus were bound up with direct colonisation and defended it.

The end of the old forms of colonisation and the award of political independence to the former colonies - especially to Algeria, which since 1830 had been a colony where French people lived - led inevitably to a new political crisis; this split the bourgeoisie, the officer-corps and the state from top to bottom. De Gaulle had to take account of these facts when he took power. As long as the problem remained un-resolved, he had to manipulate the old parties and the workers' organisations; he had to face up to and hold in check the forces attached to colonialism, for fear of a fresh "national" crisis which would tear the state apart. Yet these forces attached to colonialism had brought him to power. For this reason, article 6 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic provides for the President to be elected by the Assemblies and for the Assemblies themselves also to be elected:

"The President of the Republic is elected for seven years by an electoral college. This electoral college is made up of the members of the Parliament, the members of the General Councils and of the Assemblies of the overseas territories, as well as the elected representatives of the municipal councils."

There was no lack of attacks on the workers' movement, on the working-class and on the political parties in the course of the first years of the Fifth Republic. The Pinay-Rueff Plan - which included a sharp devaluation of the franc - was a violent attack on the purchasing power and living standards of the masses. One referendum followed another. De Gaulle got a plebiscite for the Constitution (September 28, 1958), for his policy in relation to Algeria (January 8, 1961) and for the Evian agreements (April 8, 1962). None the less, he needed the support of the leaders of the workers' movement to carry his policy in relation to Algeria. When De Gaulle announced that Algeria had the right to self-determination on September 16, 1959, he opened the struggle against the "ultras". On January 24, 1960, the "week of barricades" began in Algiers, and the uprising of the "pieds noirs" in favour of "French Algeria".

De Gaulle broke this movement, having completely won the support of the central trade union organisations, which called for a symbolic general strike on February 1. Likewise at the time of the generals' "putsch" of April 22 - 25, 1961, De Gaulle brought article 16 of the Constitution into action, with the full support of the trade union centres and of the workers' parties.

#### De Gaulle Opens the Struggle for the Corporate State - and Fails

However, once the problem of Algeria was settled, the Bonapartist regime had then to devote itself to realising the programme which justified it in the eyes of big business; the radical overthrow of class-relations in France, the destruction of the organised workers' movement, of the trade unions and the parties, crushing the working-class, atomising it and subordinating it to the state apparatus. This policy flowed from the necessity for the French bourgeoisie to integrate themselves into the European market and the world market and in international division of labour in a new way, and to proceed to profound structural changes. Their programme can be defined in a few words: to put an end to the "regime of the parties" in government, to operate the "alliance of capital and labour" and to subject the exploited layers of society to the "burning necessity of the Plan". In a few words, De Gaulle had to set up the "strong state", the corporatist state.

In the referendum of April 8, 1962, on the ratification of the Evian agreements ending the war in Algeria, De Gaulle got 90.7% of the votes, thanks to the support of the workers' parties which called for a "Yes" vote. At once he took the political offensive; he seized upon the pretext of the "Petit Clamart" incident to use a referendum to change the method by which the President of the Republic was to be elected.

The members of the Parliament carried a censure motion by an absolute majority, and De Gaulle dissolved the Assembly which had been elected in 1958, retaining Pompidou as Prime Minister. He then proceeded to a referendum on October 28, 1962, which gave him 62.25% "Yes" votes and introduced the election of the President by universal suffrage. In the month of November 1962, however, a majority of deputies not committed to support De Gaulle was elected to the National Assembly. This was only a beginning.

If the Bonapartist state was to carry out fully the purposes for which it was intended, De Gaulle had to pursue his offensive and to strike a decisive blow at the working class and its organisations. However, as Trotsky says, "in politics, time is one of the most precious of raw materials". In May 1958 the working class had undergone a severe defeat without a struggle, and the bourgeoisie had dealt it economically many heavy blows. In order to settle the problem of Algeria and to overcome the crisis in the state, however, De Gaulle still had to manipulate the workers' movement and, therefore, the working class as a class. To be sure, the workers' movement, its trade unions and its parties, had been weakened, but they still remained upright, and were to serve as the framework for a re-mobilisation of the proletariat and for the defeat to be overcome.

There was an anti-clerical demonstration in 1960, called by the Federation of National Education (F.E.N.) against the Debré Law, which was a severe attack against the non-religious character of the school. This began marching at Vincennes and attracted half a million demonstrators from all over France. It is true that when demonstrators shouted "March on Paris!", the leaders of the F.E.N. replied: "Some other time!". Then, on February 8, 1962, the French Communist Party called a demonstration. At the Charente Metro station in Paris, the police literally murdered eight demonstrators. On February 13, five days later, there was a demonstration by literally hundreds and hundreds of thousands of workers, which marched across Paris to the Pere-Lachaise Cemetery, where the eight dead of Charente were to be buried. To be sure, in this case also the leaders took good care to canalise the movement. But the most important thing was that the working class was recovering from its political defeat of 1958; it was getting ready to confront the regime.

Consequently the political victories which De Gaulle won in October 1962, which were crowned by the elections to the National Assembly in November 1962, were not enough. It was now too late for him to hope to break the working class without a struggle, to integrate the workers' trade union organisations into the state, to "establish corpor-

atism" and to "finish with the parties" without a struggle. A battle of the highest importance had now become inevitable, between the Bonapartist state incarnated in De Gaulle and the proletariat.

De Gaulle believed that he could win this decisive battle if he defeated the miners. During these years the mining industry had been severely affected by the re-structuring of French capitalism. Many coal-mines had been closed; man-power had been greatly reduced, while at the same time the purchasing power of earnings had fallen.

A powerful agitation had shown itself in the mines from the end of 1962 onwards. The miners wanted either that their demands should be met or to open a struggle. The Minister of Labour, Bokanowski, received the representatives of the trade union federations of the underground workers on February 28, 1963. The interview lasted no more than a few minutes, in which he told them that the Government rejected their demands. The miners, however, refused to support "one-day strikes" and other empty "actions". They wanted a general strike, and they imposed it on the trade union leaders, to go on until their demands were satisfied. It had been agreed that the strike would begin on Monday, March 4. On that day, only the miners in Lorraine were working. De Gaulle promulgated a decree which placed the miners under military discipline. In Lorraine - where he had got 92% of the votes in the referendum in October 1962 - every miner in Lorraine stopped work. The strike was complete throughout the coalfields on May 5. The idea of calling-up the miners had failed. The strike was to last for five weeks, and was to be unbreakable.

The intervention of the miners enabled the will of the entire working class to answer the attempt by De Gaulle to strike a decisive blow against the whole class. See below what "Informations Ouvrieres" reported on March 16, 1963.

On Wednesday, March 13, several thousand iron-miners came from Lorraine to Paris and assembled in the Place des Invalides. They came to demand that their demands be met. That morning the workers in the Clichy depot of the RATP (the Paris public transport system) decided to stop work and go to welcome the miners. They unfolded a banner in the Place des Invalides: "General Strike: That is How to Help the Miners". Innumerable proposals were made to the leaderships of the different trade union federations that they agree among themselves and issue a joint call for a general strike. The letter which the confederal bureau of the CGT sent back is typical: it stated:

"... You propose a General Strike, to be called by the three national trade union centres. This is a very attractive, but very utopian idea. It is attractive, because, whether you like it or not, it would commit the confederations alone and not their component organisations. It is utopian, because it gives the impression that all the problems of the Gaullist regime can be solved by this means. You can well imagine what would be the outcome of such an initiative. What is more, our organisations understand this very well, as has been shown by the actions which have been undertaken in textiles, chemical products, the public services, in the nationalised electricity and gas services, on the railways, in engineering, etc. These actions have never had such an advanced character as now. There, dear comrade, is the answer to the problems which your letter raises, and I hope that it gives you complete satisfaction. With trade union greetings..."

The confederal bureau of the CGT did not want a general strike. It wanted one-day strikes, and its aid to the miners was restricted to collecting money. In the end, the miners went back to work without their demands being fully satisfied. The leaderships were able to prevent the general strike which could have swept De Gaulle away; none the less, the Fifth Republic suffered a defeat from which it was not to recover.

"Informations Ouvrieres" reported in its issue of March 16, 1963:

"From the moment that De Gaulle signed the order placing the miners under military discipline, there could be no remaining doubt: he wished to deal a decisive blow to the workers' movement.

When the miners ignored the order, they called into question the "authority of the State". This step makes them the vanguard of a struggle which concerns the entire working-class.

The working class as a whole understood this immediately. This is clear from the numerous resolutions and petitions, addressed both to the different trade unions (railwaymen, teachers, public services, Paris Transport, etc.) and directly to the national confederations, since the first days of the strike. These have been carefully concealed by the press, from L'Aurore on the right to L'Humanite.

What are the workers asking for? The conclusion of a letter from the industrial grades at the Clichy depot of RATP says quite clearly:

"The only way in which the victory of the miners and of ourselves can be complete is this: all together in the strike. This is why the under-signed workers of the Clichy depot address you, comrades of the leaderships of the CGT, FO and CFTC, as well as to that of the FEN. They demand of you that you meet all together, reach agreement immediately, and issue the order for a general strike in a joint appeal.

The miners' strike touched this battle off. The whole working class has its eyes fixed on it. The least weakness could be fatal. The keys to the problem are in the hands of the national leaderships of the trade union confederations. The workers know this: that is why they address themselves to these leaderships. The Government knows it. Every layer of the bourgeoisie knows it. The press knows it... and the leaderships of the confederations know it, too. The whole policy of the Government consists of wearing the strike out, letting it turn sour, in order flexibly to obtain a retreat. They are keeping quiet about military discipline, as everyone knows. What did Rene Andrieu write in "L'Humanite" on March 15?

'The ruling power has been caught by surprise by the total failure of its order imposing military discipline. It is manoeuvring and doing its best to gain time. Obviously, it has not lost hope of finding a weakness in the solid block which the workers are presenting in opposition to it; it is trying to wear down the miners, whose strike is in its third week.'

During the last week, now, what have the leaders done? What have the parties which claim to stand for the working-class done? On Saturday, March 9, the chairmen of the Parliamentary groups of the Socialist and Communist Parties demanded that Parliament be recalled. They called on the Gaullist Parliament, which is the shadow of De Gaulle, to fight against De Gaulle! Moreover, on Sunday, March 10, they sent trade union militants round the markets and - outside churches! - to meet people coming from Mass."

### De Gaulle did not give up the struggle

For all this, De Gaulle did not stop struggling to construct the corporate state. The list of the "reforms" which he undertook between 1963 and 1968 is impressive:

"De Gaulle set up a strong police apparatus by reforming the administration, introducing a defence service and enlarging the network of planning committees (the commissions, CODER, etc.), the committee to study costs and incomes and the Tootee-Gregoire committees in the nationalised sector. The laws about vocational education were integrated into this structure, like those on the reform of the factory committees, on the reform of education (the Fouchet Plan), the anti-strike laws of July 1963 and the ordinances about employment and profit-sharing... We should also take many other elements into consideration for the picture to be complete. The army was re-organised; by the side of the striking force, there was formed a long-range attack force using parachutes and light armoured vehicles. This spent part of its time roaming around Niger and Chad, but there was no doubt that its purpose was obviously counter-revolutionary. An internal operational defence was also organised, being conceived directly so that France could be divided up into areas for police control. The police apparatus was strengthened by the addition of the CRS, the urban police and the mobile guard, as well as that of other elements of which we know less, such as the re-organisation of the system of departmental prefects. In 1967 there were important changes in personnel, with the appointment of Somville, the former right-hand man of Papon, to Pompidou's cabinet. The Ministry of the Interior was re-organised. The judges in criminal courts lost their guarantees of independence almost completely. The procedure of examining magistrates was reformed, with greater restrictions on publicity. The period of detention before trial was lengthened. To be sure, Bonapartism retained all the everyday appearance of normal democratic life. But, in reality, there is practically no area of public and individual liberties which was not gravely affected in the last period. Of course, the "democratic lawyers" remained silent and indifferent to what was going on." (From "Gaullist Bonapartism and the Tasks of the Vanguard", by Robert Clement, in "La Verite", February-March 1968, No. 540)

Following the elections to the legislature in March 1967, the Pompidou Government demanded and evidently got from the National Assembly the grant of special powers, up to October 31, to deal with economic and social problems by ordinances and decrees. The Pompidou decrees were promulgated during the summer of 1968: they dealt with:

Employment: they aimed, not at absorbing the unemployed, but at utilising the situation created by the rise in unemployment to serve capitalist profits.

The acknowledged object of the national Agency for employment was to increase the mobility of manpower. In this way, "at the expense of the state", there was created an organisation which can be compared with private employment agencies like "Manpower", and this aimed at controlling 30% to 35% of <sup>the</sup> national labour force. The problem was to deal with a mass of workers, whose skills were no longer needed, who could be exploited without limit, who could be shifted about at any moment from one end of the country to the other according to the needs of profit.

Social Security: the problem here was to dismantle a conquest of the working class. It was, definitively, to take back from the workers the deferred wages which belonged to them, represented by the Social Security funds, in order to force them back into profit-making work. For this purpose, it was necessary to break up the institution of Social Security itself, to take away from the workers all control of the funds which belong to them and to threaten the health of hundreds of thousands of workers by raising the contributions, restricting the range of risks covered, the reduction of the state contribution.



Workers' Participation: the very words of the introduction to the ordinance on workers' participation express its content: "It is necessary to make the workers participate in the expansion of the firms and to give them a direct interest in this, especially as the Fifth Plan correctly subordinates economic growth to an increase in investment from within the firm." We see here that we are not dealing, as the leaders of the workers' movement stated, with a simple and straight-forward lie. The intention is to force the workers to participate in their own super-exploitation. The problem is to associate the trade union organisations with 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 organisations of struggle for workers' demands into gear-wheels of the employers and the state. What was involved was an important step towards integrating the trade unions into the state apparatus.

Adapting Firms to the Common Market: this ordinance laid down a whole series of measures, in particular tax reliefs for firms which modernised. It meant that the general tax-payer - which means the worker in the first place - would bear the cost of the development of the great capitalist enterprises."

This was the framework within which their problem was to put into application the Fifth Plan (what De Gaulle called "the burning necessity of the Plan"). Its purpose was to make French capitalism competitive by the time when, in May 1968, the customs barriers between the six countries of the Common Market would be abolished. That meant raising the exploitation of the working-class and breaking all capacity to resist in the exploited masses and the youth.

However, the political conditions were no longer the same as they had been before the miners' strike in March - April 1963. The political defeat of De Gaulle had had severe repercussions on the regime, in which the bourgeoisie lost some of its confidence. De Gaulle could not run the risk of a direct confrontation, "class against class", with the proletariat and the youth, from which, at the time of the miners' strike, the trade union apparatuses and in the first place that of the CGT, had protected him. This time he had to manoeuvre and resort to cunning, but time was running out.

What were finally decisive were the political processes which developed in the workers' movement, within the working class and the youth, and the complex relationships which were formed there in relation to the state power and capital. The limits of this article do not allow these to be traced in detail; we have to be content to point out the most obvious facts.

Hardly had the miners' strike ended when the Stalinist apparatus used all its resources to launch a wave of one-day, disruptive strikes. Even before the miners' strike, the Stalinist apparatus had succeeded in imposing a series of one-day strikes on certain categories of workers, in order to block and to liquidate a spontaneous strike movement which arose in the RATP on the eve of the referendum of October 1962. These strikes went on for weeks, and resulted in wearing out the workers involved, with the exception of the workers in those depots (including Clichy) who proposed, instead of one-day stoppages, a strike until the demands were won. Hardly was the miners' strike ended, when the Stalinist apparatus of the CGT criminally launched a new series of one-day strikes, this time on the railway network of RATP. It deliberately gave to the government the excuse to win a small revenge; in July 1963 the Gaullist National Assembly voted a first law restricting the right to strike in the public services. Five full days' notice before starting a strike became obligatory. For all that, the apparatuses were not to give up their tactic of deliberate sabotage of the workers' readiness to struggle.

For and Against the Slogan "All Out Together"

But the conviction that the General Strike against De Gaulle and the employers was necessary to win their demands, and was possible at the moment of the miners' strike, was deeply implanted in the working class. The method of one-day strikes cut across the experience and the aspirations of the masses. The apparatus of the CGT had to manoeuvre and to resort to deceptions on the workers and the militants in order to carry its policy out. It issued the slogan of a national day of strike for March 17, 1964. The workers participated powerfully in the strikes and demonstrations, showing that they were willing to "fight all together". This is what the "Nantes Appeal" expressed; it was issued by 135 workers of that city, on the initiative of the OCI, and ended as follows:

"In order to fight, unity in action was brought about! Unity in action means that the one-day strikes, which divide, break up and atomise the workers' front, must be denounced and given up. The trade union organisations must lead the general struggle, but on the level of the national leaderships, none of the federations undertakes to engage in such an action.

The trade union organisations must lead the struggle against the capitalist regime, but all of them participate in the different organisms (the Plan, etc.) in which the employers are preparing the bad blows against the working class. Workers, trade union members of <sup>all</sup> the tendencies, it is for us to impose, to control and to oversee the behaviour of our leaders. Let us organise! Let us discuss together! Let us impose our decisions!"

Thousands of workers in different parts of France were to sign this appeal, A whole agitation developed on the basis of it in the course of 1964 for "All Out Together". On June 19 there was a meeting with hundreds present at the Salle Lancry and numerous responsible militants spoke there, but none the less the trade union apparatuses (first and foremost the CGT and frequently with the support of the CFTC) went the round of one-day strikes of railwaymen, postal workers, metal-workers etc. These one-day strikes permitted the government to persuade the Assembly to vote for a new law which restricted the right of air traffic controllers to strike.

#### December 11, 1964... and what Followed

The government of De Gaulle and Pompidou tirelessly kept up its attack on the working class. The leaders of the "Force Ouvriere" reached the position of proposing "a combination general strike against the Fifth Plan, the incomes policy and the subordination of the trade unions to the state". The leaderships of the CGT and of the CFTC in the public services, with whom the leaders of Force Ouvriere and the FEN were associated, decided to call a demonstration of workers in this sector for December 2, 1964, in the Place de l'Opera in Paris. The government banned the demonstration. The leaders of Force Ouvriere and the FEN then called on all the unions to back a 24-hour general strike on December 11. The leaders of the CGT and of the CFTC supported the call, but at the same time restricted it to state employees and workers in the public services. The Force Ouvriere leaders, for their part, refused to have an explicit united front with the leaders of the CGT. Yet the desire to be "All Out Together" was so strong, the desire for a general strike, that the strike on December 11 was total in the public services and among the state employees, and numerous private firms closed their doors because hundreds of thousands of workers in the private sector stayed away from work. Once again the strike revealed the fantastic power of the working class.

From that moment onwards the question began to be asked: What comes next? The only positive answer was to embark upon the general strike against De Gaulle and for the satisfaction of the demands. This was the answer which the working class awaited from the leaders of the trade union centres. The call of the national confederal committee of the CGT - Force Ouvriere for the strike of December 11 made a brave show:

"Against the reactionary policy of the government, which leads to unemployment and favours capitalist profits:

Against the Fifth Plan, which has no social objectives:

Against the stabilisation plan, which puts a brake on wages:

Against the illusion of a so-called incomes policy:

Against the attempts of the authorities to neutralise the trade unions:

In the face of the paralysing pressure of this regime, this is no time for delay, nor for guerrilla tactics."

But - beware! The leaders of Force Ouvriere and of the FEN had regarded the twenty-four hour strike as a useful means of exerting pressure on De Gaulle and his government. The question of finishing with them and their policy never arose. Therefore, there was no follow-up to the strike. The Stalinists were trapped between the desire of the masses to go "All Out Together" and the order for the 24-hour general strike which came from the leaders of Force Ouvriere and the FEN. They had to fall in line behind, while all the time they restricted the strike call to workers in the public services and state employees.

An agreement of great significance was then reached between the leaders of the apparatuses in order to de-fuse the consequences of the 24-hour general strike of December 11, 1964. Immediately after the 11th, the CGT apparatus once again launched sectional strikes, of railway train crews on the 18th and 19th and in the postal services. We have only to look at the resolution of the administrative council of the CGT on December 22 (in "Le Peuple", No. 716) to understand what this meant:

"United action will have its full effect if sustained campaigns for immediate demands are systematically organised and develop in every workplace, locality and organisation, against every employer and every employers' organisation, taking care to make sure that the population understands and supports what is being done. These campaigns will be fully effective, to the extent that demands appropriate to each category of workers are presented... and that every initiative is taken to bring in the trade unions, to consult the workers and to decide in common with them and the other organisations on the slogans at each phase of the development of the action, allying partial movements to movements of greater scope."

On January 6 and 8, 1965, there were fresh communications from the federal bureau of the CGT. These proclaimed:

"... a strike before the end of the month of January, if the government persists in its refusal to open effective negotiations instead of the present dilatory proceedings, which all the trade union organisations have condemned.

The bureau of the CGT will actively support the organisations in the public sector and the nationalised industries for the complete success of the strike, which will begin before the end of January... At the same time, the CGT calls upon its organisations (the federations in the private sector)... to take the necessary initiatives and make the necessary contacts to ensure the widest possible participation, in conditions which take account of all the circumstances."

#### A Two-Day Strike: January 27 and 28, 1965

The leadership of Force Ouvriere, which declared itself to be "anti-unity", issued a call to the state employees and workers in the public services to strike on January 27 and 28, along with the GT, the CFDT, the CGC and the FEN. On January 20, the "Executive Committee of the CGT - FO, enlarged by representatives from the federations", declared, under pressure from the confederal bureau, that it "fully supported the federations which had decided to strike on January 27 and 28". This action was really a prolongation of December 11, 1964. What was more, the Force Ouvriere organisations called upon the workers in the private sector to "participate widely and actively in the movement". ("Force Ouvriere", January 27, 1965)

"Informations Ouvrieres" No 233, dated February 6, 1965, was mimeographed. It wrote:

"After the strikes of January 27 and 28, all the federations - CGT, FO, CFDT - as well as the FEN, congratulated themselves on the 'breadth' of the 'second phase' of the movement. In fact this self-satisfaction has no basis in reality. On December 11, 80% of the workers struck. On January 27 and 28, on the average, barely 40% struck. We have witnessed here a successful operation which in hardly more than a month achieved the result of de-fusing the possibilities which were opening. On December 11, the public service workers and the private sector workers who supported them participated in the strike on a large scale. They were perfectly well aware that the strike of December 11 would not result in immediately winning their demands. They accepted this movement as a step towards 'All Out Together' against the government. The slogans of the confederation spelt out these objectives in part: against integration and against the attempts of the state to neutralise the trade unions. As a stage towards a general action aimed at making the government capitulate, December 11 had to precede a wider mobilisation, a more general one, just as certainly as Pompidou and De Gaulle clearly revealed their intention not to retreat."

Further on in the same article, "Informations Ouvrieres" developed this point:

"What is it that we have been witnessing? On December 19, the CGT and the CFDT called a first, limited strike of the train crews on the SNCF (the State railways). During the month of January, all the leaders of the confederation did their utmost together to disorganise the possibilities which December 11 had opened up. The mechanism of this shameful betrayal was well adjusted: we will briefly trace the plot:

1. The strike was to take place, not all together, but stretched over two days:
2. The desire to fragment the movement was so developed that, for example, in Social Security, the CGT and the CFDT imposed the strike in the Paris region on the 27th and in the provinces on the 28th.
3. The Paris Metro, the state schools and the railways were called out on the 27th and the electricity supply workers on the 28th! The strike was split up to such an extent that it depended on the morning of the 27th on a single category of workers, the Metro drivers, whose independent union, what is more, had taken a position against the strike! This is the reason why the so-called general movement, which Frachon, Laure, Bergeron and Descamps organised was supported by barely 2,000 workers at 5.30. The Metro was running on the 27th and part of the workers could get to work!"

The year 1965 was punctuated by innumerable one-day strikes. It was, also, the year in which, according to the Constitution, the President of the Republic was to be elected by universal suffrage, the Bonapartist character of the Constitution having been strengthened by the results of the referendum of October 1962. Neither the SFIO (Socialist Party) nor the Communist Party presented candidates of their own in these elections. Together they supported the candidature of Francois Mitterand. But something must be made clear: at this time Mitterand was not a member, let alone a leader, of one of the large workers parties. He was at the head of a small, bourgeois formation, the UDSR. To be sure, the very fact that De Gaulle had to run the gauntlet of an election was a political setback for the regime. None the less, the most important thing was that the leaders of the SFIO and the PCF blocked any possibility of a class political expression, or of class issues being raised for the working-class, when they did not stand a workers' party cand-

idate. Their policy at the level of the presidential elections was the same as that of one-day strikes and of refusing "All Out Together" at the level of the workers' industrial struggles. Another aspect of the same policy was the collaboration of the unions with the employers' representatives in the joint committee. The leaders of the workers' parties and of the trade union apparatuses desperately defended the bourgeois state, that is, the Fifth Republic. No less desperately, they resisted the realisation of the workers' united front.

### The Strikes and the Elections to the Legislature in 1967

It would be an extremely long and tedious task to list the innumerable one-day strikes and actions of the kind which the bureaucratic apparatuses were to impose on the working class over months and years. The initiators of this policy were the Stalinist apparatus of the CGT. On January 10, 1966, the leaderships of the CGT and of the CFTC (which had become the CFTD) reached a unity agreement on the basis of participating in the joint committees with the employers, and from then onwards the method of one-day strikes was resumed in the name of "unity". But this succession of one-day strikes led to unbearable tensions between the working-class, the militants and the apparatuses. The latter had to relax this tension: in order to give satisfaction to the militants and the "base", the apparatus of the CGT called a nation-wide day of strike for May 17. May 17 once more revealed that the workers were willing to fight in unity. The strike was relatively well organised and, in the afternoon, there was an important demonstration from the Bastille to the Place de la Republique in Paris, supported by some 80,000 workers and militants.

However, the leaderships were already preparing for the elections to the Legislature in March 1967, were adapting themselves to the political institutions of the regime and subordinat<sup>ing</sup> the working class and the youth to them. The leaderships of the SFIO and of the PCF followed the same line after the Presidential elections. The SFIO allied itself to small bourgeois formations like the UDSR, as well as to part of the Radicals. The confederal bureaux of the CGT and of the CFDT, for their part, called for "nation-wide strike" for February 1, and this was taken rather seriously.

However, "Le Monde" pointed out, on February 8:

"The next step in trade union activity: the leadership of the CGT met on Tuesday, and discussed what had been gained on February 1. The confederal bureau will meet on February 10; after that, representatives of the two confederation will meet. Contacts are expected, likewise, with the teachers' union, the FEN. In any case, the trade union leaders give a categorical assurance that, in pursuing their work, they do not have in mind any general demonstration between now and March 5."

This makes everything clear. The leaders of the CGT and of the CFDT had opened the "safety valve" on February 1.

None the less, during the election period there were great disturbances of "social peace". First, by the workers in the Dassault plants at Bordeaux. In these plants a whole agitation developed during December 1966. It expressed the workers' will to win their demand for an increase of 50 new francs an hour for everyone. At the end of January 1967 the management locked the workers out and sent letters sacking 63 of them. The Dassault workers at Bordeaux responded by striking for the re-engagement of the sacked workers and for the 50 francs. As the electoral campaign developed, the Dassault management ended the lock-out and took back the people who had been sacked. The trade union leaders wanted them to go back on Wednesday, February 22, when the management ended the lock-out. But the workers imposed the continuation of the strike from inside the factory. In the end, the Dassault management conceded on February 28 an increase ranging from 26 to 38 francs an hour and equalisation, in several stages, of earnings with those of the Paris region, to be complete by December 1967. The firm gave way a few days before the first round in the elections (March 5). The Dassault workers did not respect social peace. It must be said that in Bordeaux the Force Ouvrier union was led by "class struggle" militants.

SOLIDARITY WITH THE WORKERS AT DASSAULT

The workers and the youth, who met at St. Ouen on February 17, 1967 in the first election meeting organised by the ORGANISATION COMMUNISTE INTERNATIONALISTE (for the Re-construction of the Fourth International) address you, who are locked out by Dassault, to express their complete solidarity.

- We inform you:
1. In the meeting, 900 NF were collected and have been entrusted to cde. Salamero, a class-struggle trade unionist, to hand over to you.
  2. They are directing to the trade union centres, the CGT, CGT - FO, CFDT and FEN, the demand to organise in unity at every level and in every workplace collections of money which is indispensable to you to hold out and win.
  3. Cde. Stephane Just, a worker in the RATP, and who is the Trotskyist candidate, has sent a letter to Etienne FAJON, the PCF candidate, and to the SFIO candidate in the constituency for:
    - (a) The PCF and the SFIO to utilise the speaking time allotted to them on radio and TV to appeal to the workers in every firm to show their active solidarity with those whom Dassault has locked out:
    - (b) Collections to be taken in all the election meetings organised by the PCF, the SFIO and the OCI to help you in your struggle:

The workers who met at St. Ouen believe that this financial solidarity must form part of an active mobilisation of workers, and in particular of engineering workers, who should be called upon to form a United Front for a general stoppage in solidarity.

In pursuit of this aim, the workers whom Dassault has locked out can force Dassault to concede:

- the 50 francs all-round for which they went into battle:
- The unconditional ending of the lock-out:
- No Sackings.

This is the way in which Dassault, who is the political backer of the UNR, of De Gaulle and of Chaban-Delmas, a member of the Chamber of Deputies for Bordeaux, the No. 3 personality of the regime, can be forced to retreat.

The victory of the workers at Dassault can be the first stage in a counter-attack by the workers against what Capital is doing and against the preparations of the employers and the bourgeois State to make 600,000 unemployed under the Fifth Plan, to dismantle Social Security and to get rid of skilled workers.

The victory of the Dassault workers can make it possible to defeat De Gaulle in the elections, on the battle-ground of the class-war.

LONG LIVE THE COMPLETE VICTORY OF  
THE WORKERS AT DASSAULT

LONG LIVE THE WORKERS AT DASSAULT WHO, IN 1967,  
ARE OPENING THE ROAD TO STRUGGLE BY THE WHOLE WORKING-CLASS  
AS IN 1936, THE WORKERS IN BLOCH DASSAULT  
GAVE THE SIGNAL FOR THE GENERAL STRIKE OF JUNE 1936  
carried unanimously by the 400 workers present

(Leaflet issued by the OCI)

The OCI put up a candidate for the first time in these legislative elections. This single candidature in one constituency in the Department of the Seine gave a point of support for a political campaign for breaking off participation with the employers, for the United Front of the workers' parties, for the general mobilisation of the working class and of the exploited masses against De Gaulle, his government and his policies. The OCI linked inseparably its political agitation with utilising the electoral campaign directly in the class struggle, according to the methods of the proletariat, as the above leaflet shows.

Important strikes developed during the electoral period. At Rhodiaceta the workers of the plant at Lyon-Vaise imposed a strike on February 28, while those at the Besancon plant had already been out for several days. The apparatuses, however, imposed a rule that the strike had to be stopped and re-started every day. In particular they kept quiet about the election campaign and isolated the strike movement from it. Only on March 15, three days after the second day of voting, the chemical federations called for one-day and sectional strikes in the other plants of the group. That same day, Thursday, March 15, the employers broke off discussions, on the ground that the unions could not ensure "freedom" for non-strikers to work. After being out for twenty-three days the workers in Rhodiaceta were forced back to work with a rise of only 3.8%. This agreement was reached at the national level, with the arbitration of the government, between Rhone-Poulenc and the trade union leaders.

Then it was the workers at Berliet who struck. But they remained isolated: the CRS occupied the plant and the workers were forced to go back without having gained anything, thanks to the betrayal by their leaders. It was the same, after weeks of strikes, for the monthly-paid workers in the ship-yards at Saint-Nazaire and for the miners in the East of France.

#### The Opening of a New Stage

However, at the very time when the workers were being defeated, "Informations Ouvrieres" for June 1967 pointed out:

"The monthly-paid workers at Nantes, the workers at Berliet and then, after the elections, the miners in the East of France all bear witness to the willingness of the of the working class to organise resistance. These partial strikes are not at all one-day strikes."

The Government had to act more quickly, both because of the state of class-relations in France and because the complete opening of the European Common Market in 1968 was approaching. On April 26, 1967, the Council of Ministers decided to demand authority from Parliament to settle all economic and social problems by decree, up until October 31. The day after the elections the OCI addressed to the trade union centres the demand that they organise nation-wide meetings of the working class in order that a united front of the working class and the youth could be formed. Its programme would be to protect purchasing power, conditions of work, the market for skills and the protection of young workers. It would aim at united struggle in line with the lessons of the preceding struggle and with the need to prepare a counter-stroke to the offensive of capital and of the bourgeois state. This slogan is fully in accord with the class politics which the Trotskyists defended in their election campaign. Starting from that point, thousands of workers and youth could be and needed to be re-grouped, in order to struggle in the factories, in the unions, among the working-class youth and among those in the schools, to impose a policy of struggle of class against class on the leaders of the trade union centres. In pursuance of this orientation and concretising it, the OCI took the initiative on June 24, 1967, of calling in Paris a "General Assembly against the Ill-

Treatment of Youth" and, on June 25, a "Conference of Workers and Youth for the Workers' United Front", for calling national meetings to encourage unity.

The OCI carried out a wide distribution of the declaration by its Central Committee, a extract from which follows:

DECLARATION OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE OCI

May 1, 1967

Against the Special Powers!  
For the Defence of Workers' and Democratic Liberties!  
Against the Starvation of the Youth!  
For Guarantees of Jobs and Skills!  
To Defend the Buying Power of Money!

The workers' and trade union organisations - and in the first place the CGT, the CGT-FO and the FEN - must in unity call for

500,000 workers and youth  
to demonstrate  
in front of the National Assembly

Militants of all tendencies understood on April 15 the threats which hang over the workers and their organisations. They took the initiative to force the workers' trade union centres to organise nation-wide conferences, for guarantees of employment and the defence of the buying-power of money, against the downgrading of skills and in defence of liberties.

They now appeal to workers and militants to re-group and organise a demonstration of 500,000 men and women workers in front of the National Assembly, and for every worker in France, men and women, to demonstrate in front of the prefectures of the departments where they live.

It would, of course, be a profound mistake to believe that it was the call by the Central Committee of the OCI which led the leaders of the trade union centres to call for a 24-hour general strike on May 17, 1967. But it would be equally erroneous not to understand that, weak as the OCI still was, the fact that it was formulating the needs and the aspirations of the masses, that its members were struggling in the unions, in the workplaces and among the youth on this line, became a factor in the consciousness and the activity of the masses.

The Stalinist apparatus, for its part, made no mistake on that score. The declaration of the Central Committee of the OCI was distributed after May 8, that is, before the trade union centres took the decision to call for a "nation-wide strike" on May 17, 1967, and (apart from the FO) for a demonstration from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Republique in Paris.

On May 5, the regional organisation of the CGT denounced "provocation", and on May 11, "L'Humanite" carried this statement:

"Since the decision was taken to strike for 24 hours, rumours have been circulating (the origin of which remains uncertain) attributing to the Parisian region trade unions the intention of organising a demonstration on May 17 outside the National Assembly.

Everyone knows the warning which the Paris Region CGT issued on May 5 on this subject.



It was intended to allow no ambiguity to exist and to denounce the provocative character of this diversion.

In the last forty-eight hours the instigators of this provocation have revealed themselves. We are dealing here with Trotskyist groups, which are circulating leaflets in the Paris region aimed at making the organisations fall into this vulgar trap.

These irresponsible elements, alien to the trade union movement, always reveal themselves in the periods of intense working-class struggle as the advocates of every bad move and every attempt by the government and the employers to mount provocations which will rebound against the workers' movement.

It is evident that it is quite enough for the workers and their trade union organisations to know who is instigating this piece of adventurism for their vigilance to be aroused."

Here we have evidence that the slogans of the OCI were corresponding to the aspirations of the masses. The strike on May 17 was to be on a very large scale and the demonstration, even though it lacked perspective, was well supported. Here was another reason for the apparatus of the CGT and of the CFDT to try to call more one-day strikes. The departmental unions of the CGT and of the CFDT in engineering in the Paris region staged a day of "multiple actions" for May 31. Thanks to this, the government of De Gaulle and Pompidou was able to get the National Assembly to give it special powers and to produce its decess during the summer. When the schools opened in the autumn of 1967 there also began the application of the reform of education which bears the name of Fouchet. Its aim was to get rid of 300,000 students.

We should pause at the "National Assembly of Youth against the Ill-Treatment of Youth", held on June 24, and the "Conference of Workers and Youth for the Workers' United Front" held on June 25. The national youth meeting attracted a thousand people, and opened the perspective of a central demonstration of youth against poverty and ill-treatment. The centres of this activity were the Committee of Revolutionary Students and the journal "Revoltes". On June 25 1,100 militants met at the Salle de la Mutualite in Paris for the National Meeting for Unity in Action. The resolution which they carried called for the formation of Workers' Alliance Committees:

"We, militant workers of all tendencies and youth resolve today to form ourselves at every level, in the work-places, in professional occupations and localities, into Workers' Alliance Committees. We solemnly declare that it is not our intention to substitute ourselves for the organisations, and especially for the trade union centres, in order to arrive at unity in action, a task which naturally falls upon the trade unions.

The Workers' Alliance Committees undertake to struggle in all circumstances within their organisations so that the united front, class against class, becomes the instrument for mobilising the workers' resistance to exploitation.

As a method to reach this aim, the militants will fight for united action conferences to be called, at every level, in the work-places, in the professions and between the professions, in order that inter-union and inter-professional committees may be formed to resist the special powers, with the aim of achieving in the end nationwide conferences for unity in action."

The offensive against the workers and the youth was stepped up during the closing months of 1967 and the early months of 1968. But likewise the resistance of the youth and the workers increased. Despite the apparatuses and over their heads this resistance developed more and more clearly into conflict with the State apparatus, that is, into political struggle by the methods of the proletariat against the government. There were violent pitched battles on October 4 at Limoges and Le Mans between peasants and the CRS. On October 10, again at Le Mans there were violent confrontations between workers and the CRS. The supplement to "Informations Ouvrieres", produced by the OCI group in the department of the Sarthe pointed out:

"The trade union organisations organised in Paris on October 10 controlled delegations of worker-militants, to support the censure motion, but without the slightest risk of calling bourgeois legality into question.

The workers in the private sector in particular are called out to demonstrate only in the provinces!

Only in Le Mans did the workers' demonstration not develop 'in calm and dignity' as had been expected.

On October 10 the workers of Le Mans showed that they wish to defend their dignity as workers. They showed that it is impossible for us to defend our interests if we do not call into question the bourgeoisie and the established order, within which the trade union leaders wish to constrict them at all costs.

The workers at Le Mans re-affirmed this desire on October 26. The struggle then was qualitatively and quantitatively on a larger scale. On October 10, there had been 7,000 strikers; on October 26 there were 14,000.

On October 10, the workers had in mind that they should make their demonstration an effective means of defending their class-interests. There was the example of the peasant demonstration on October 2, which had preceded theirs. That day, however they could not yet challenge the forces of the police.

However, on October 26, after the prefect had forbidden them:

- to go and demonstrate outside the offices of the employers' organisation and outside the Prefecture:
- to demonstrate on the streets and then to put up barricades:

the workers of Le Mans did not give up their slogan of action for that day. They knew that they were taking on the bourgeois state and its police forces. Workers from Renault with whom we discussed said clearly to us: 'We cannot stop where we are. We wanted to demonstrate at Le Mans that we have not decided to let them do whatever they like with us. We wanted to be an example for everywhere else in France.'

The trade union leaderships had to give way to the will of the workers to have their demonstration on the ground which they themselves had chosen."

The agitation against the Fouchet Plan in the University had been developing ever since the schools had re-opened in the autumn. On November 9 there was a meeting in Paris in the Rue Soufflot, in front of the head office of the UNEF; 5,000 students took part. But the students could not be satisfied with this "tolerated" meeting. Against those who were wanted to go quietly wandering about outside the University quarter, the revolutionary militants proposed the Sorbonne as an objective. There was a brief but violent encounter at the intersection of the rue Soufflot and the Boulevard Saint-Michel. The SNES and the SNE-Sup had to give way and to appeal to the students to march on the Sorbonne. 5,000 students demonstrated, shouting "Down with Selection", "Up with the Le Mans Workers" and "No! to the Government".

#### The Co-ordination Committee, the RATP, Social Security and the Students

Still once again the apparatuses of the CGT and of the CFDT called for "a day of action". The great mass of the workers refused to take part in it. Not that they had accepted their fate and were putting up with it: on the contrary, they had had enough of it. What they wanted was to fight against De Gaulle and his politics. They wanted the General Strike, "All Out Together". On December 3 and 4, 1967, on the initiative of the OCI, twenty-two militants of every tendency, including non-unionists, workers and clerks in RATP, Social Security and students, met and decided to prepare for a second meeting on December 19, which attracted 150 workers and employees in the same establishments, as well as students. These 150 workers, employees and students were to express the deepest needs of the masses. They formed a co-ordination committee.

Extract from the Appeal agreed on January 5, 1968  
by the Co-ordination Committee

On May 17, 1967, the workers and the youth showed that they are ready to struggle... But the leaders have refused to organise the struggle, the only struggle which the workers of France and the workers of Paris wanted to engage, which is to get organised in the ship-yards, the offices, the factories and the nationalised industries, so as to finish up with a General Strike.

There has been no General Strike against the Special Decrees:

There has been no General Strike for guaranteed jobs and to defend the buying-power of money:

Our leaders have counter-posed, to the unified strength of the employers and the State, a tactic of dispersed movements, which break the will to fight of the workers.

Sackings continue. The cost of living rises. Social Security is dismantled. The opening of the school year is catastrophic. This is the result of atomised, dispersed, one-day strikes.

#### T H I S M U S T C E A S E !

After the day of action on December 13, which led to a set-back, the leaders want to start all over again with one-day strikes, in engineering, in textiles and in the nationalised industries?

How far do these leaders want to go? Why do the trade union confederations refuse to prepare serious actions against the employers and the government? Why do the leaders sit in the Commissions of the Fifth Plan, which prepare unemployment, poverty and sackings?

Why do they sit in the administrative committees of the Social Security, with the job of raising contributions and cutting benefits?

Why do the trade union centres never ask for the advice of the workers before they decide to call one-day strikes, against the workers' wishes?

Why, when there are hundreds of thousands of us in the Paris region, do the leaders always organise demonstrations from the Place de la Bastille to the Place de la Republique or the other way?

Why do the trade union centres not call for demonstrations in the places where the people who are destroying the conquests of the working class are to be found -

in front of the employers' premises  
in front of the Prefectures  
in front of the Ministries  
at the seat of the Government?

THE WORKERS OUGHT TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES  
ONE SINGLE RESPONSE!

The workers must organise in committees to prepare to struggle, on the level of the workplaces, the ship-yards, the schools, the localities, and of Departments and the whole country, by occupations and by

bringing different occupations together.

The Committee for the Defence of Teachers in Training has already decided, on January 3 - 4, since our meeting, to join in the work of the Co-ordinating Committee!

We appeal to women workers, men workers, youth and militants, in every workplace, in every school, at every level, locally, departmentally and nationally, on all who are aware of what is at stake in the class-battle which is being prepared and where the fate of the working-class and of the youth will be decided, to sign this appeal, and to support the Co-ordinating Committee, which we, militants of every tendency, of the Paris RATP, clerks in the Social Security and students, have created.

#### The Road to Victory is Open

The front of Resistance to Super-Exploitation, Poverty and Unemployment must be opened. The Co-ordinating Committee is aware of its responsibilities for the future of the working-class and the youth. It has decided to call workers, militants and youth to a workers' meeting on March 1, 1968, where the concrete tasks to be carried out to force back the employers and their state and to defeat them can be worked out.

It is the duty of every militant to shoulder his responsibility in this struggle. That means getting in touch with the Co-ordinating Committee.

What is at stake is the future and the fate of millions and millions of workers. What is at stake is the future of the youth.

At the end of January and the beginning of February 1968 the assembly workers in the Saviem lorry plant "went up into the office", infuriated by one-day strikes and fruitless stoppages. They voted for "un-limited strike until our demands are won". Soon the idea came up of marching on Paris. These workers were joined by thousands of engineers and other workers in other firms. They went into battle with the CRS. All the resources of the apparatuses were needed to contain this movement, to turn it back and then to dislocate it. None the less, these political explosions all served notice that something was being prepared within the working class and the youth, and that this would be a general explosion; it would be the beginning of a battle for the demands of the masses against the Government of De Gaulle and Pompidou and their policies. The meeting of May 1 took its place within these relationships. It was a mutual pledge by militants, on the eve of the events which were to lead directly to the General Strike of May - June 1968.

#### TOWARDS THE GENERAL STRIKE

The agitation of the students began to spread from the month of March 1968 onwards. It became sharper throughout the month of April, especially in the University at Nanterre. On April 27, 28 and 29, the FER (Federation of Revolutionary Students) was formed, during a conference of 200 delegates representing about 1,000 students. In the course of the preceding weeks De Gaulle and Pompidou had come to the conclusion, in line with their general policy of adapting the structure of French capitalism to the needs of the world market, that they could break the resistance of the student youth to the application of the Fouchet reform. They used the agitation which ruled in the University at Nanterre as a pretext for closing it. Several students were brought up before the disciplinary committee with a view to excluding them. On Wednesday, May 3, the fascist-tending "groupuscules" (this time the word really fits), whose links with the police were evident, announced that they would "sweep the Marxist rabble out of the Sorbonne". Several hundred militants who had taken part in the struggle on March 22,

supporters of the Jeunesses Communistes Revolutionnaires, of the pro-Chinese groups and of the Federation of Revolutionary Students, assembled in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. Considerable forces of police surrounded the Sorbonne, and then, at the request of the Rector, entered it and arrested the militants of these organisations, whom they put into police vans.

This operation was a complement to that at Nanterre. Its aim was to "behead" the students politically, in order to destroy their ability to resist the application of the Fouchet reforms. The Government believed that it could break the students, because it had the full support of the French Communist Party. The PCF did its best to discredit the student movement in the eyes of the workers. Marchais himself took up his pen on Wednesday, May 3: "L'Humanite" carried the notorious article in which Marchais wrote:

"The little left-ist groups are agitating everywhere... These false revolutionaries ... support the interests of the Gaullist Government and the big capitalist monopolies. In general, we are dealing here with the sons of big bourgeois, who despise the students of working-class origin."

#### "LIBERATE OUR COMRADES"

But the unforeseen happened. Spontaneously several thousands of students gathered in the streets around the Sorbonne. They demonstrated. A cry went up: "Liberate our comrades!" There were arrests, followed by sentences to hard labour. The Sorbonne was occupied by the police and closed. The UNEF and the SNESup issued the call for a general strike of students and teachers in the university. They addressed an appeal to the workers, calling upon them to demonstrate their solidarity. The student movement was marshalled on the basis of precise demands: the administrative, judicial and academic proceedings against students must be dropped: the cases being heard must be dismissed, the imprisoned students must be liberated, all police forces must be withdrawn from university premises and their neighbourhoods; the lock-out of the university premises must be ended.

However, the trial of strength with the students, as it had worked out, did not frighten the De Gaulle - Pompidou Government. The bourgeois state has the resources to crush the students - provided that the working-class does not move. The outcome of the struggle depended completely on the workers intervening. The process which was to lead to the 24-hour General Strike and to the demonstration of May 13 began during May 6 and 7. Thousands of young workers joined the student demonstrations and took part in the fighting with the CRS. From May 8 onwards the trade union centres and especially that of the CGT, like the leaderships of the workers' parties and especially that of the French Communist Party, had to make a "turn", in the face of the indignation, the rage and the feeling which possessed the workers that they must act in solidarity with the students. They were in contact with the UNEF on Thursday, May 9 and Friday, May 10, and advanced the proposal for a demonstration on Tuesday, May 14, to declare the solidarity of the workers with the students.

Very fortunately, the working class was sufficiently mobilised and involved for the demonstration of the night of May 10 and 11 not to end with the student movement being crushed. Under the leadership of Cohn-Bendit and the Jeunesses Communistes Revolutionnaires, without any perspective, several thousand students let themselves be surrounded in the heart of the Latin Quarter by thousands and thousands of police, CRS and mobile guards, as if they were in a fish-trap. They threw up barricades and fought with courage and desperation against the forces of the police which attacked them. Cohn-Bendit proposed, as the aim of the demonstration, that the students should re-occupy the Sorbonne. Several hours later, at 6 o'clock in the morning, he could only appeal to the trade union organisations against the repression. The workers in fact could not tolerate the repression of the students. They had firmly made up their minds that, if the state forces of repression crushed the students, that would mean a victory for De Gaulle and Pompidou, which would give the Government the means to open up its offensive against the working class. On the morning of May 11, the trade union centres had to recognise that the working-class had decided that matters should not be left to take their course; they gave the order for a General Strike and a demonstration on May 13. Pompidou was hardly back from Afghanistan in time to correct the policy of the Government and beat

a strategic retreat. The police evacuated the Sorbonne and the students who had been imprisoned were set free.

But Pompidou was already too late. The call by the trade union centres hardened the determination of the workers to join battle against the Government and De Gaulle, a determination which have been growing for many years.

That is the reason why the General Strike developed as it did. No doubt a point had been reached in class relations at which an explosion had inevitably to take place. None the less, weak as the OCI still was, it had consistently opened the road which led to the General Strike of May - June 1968. The intervention of the FER at each moment dealt with the urgent problem of mobilising the students in relation to the aim of mobilising the working class. It was under the impulsion derived from the FER that the UNEF was to play its role as a trade union organisation: it took its place on the ground of the workers' united front and addressed the working class. It called the demonstration of Monday, May 6. Here is its appeal:

#### THE APPEAL OF THE UNEF TO THE PEOPLE

Police violence savagely repressed the students on the evening of Friday, May 3. There were 593 arrests and hundreds of wounded. Like the workers of Caen and elsewhere, students and passers-by have been beaten by a ferocious repression.

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

The reactionary press aims at presenting the student movement as a revolt of privileged young people and tries to cut us off from our natural allies. The bourgeoisie knows in fact that the students can win only if they are by the side of the workers. The students must overcome this wall of lies and make the objects of their struggle known to the population.

THE BOURGEOISIE WANTS TO ISOLATE AND DIVIDE THE MOVEMENT: our answer must be immediate.

This is why:

UNEF PROPOSES TO THE TRADE UNIONS OF TEACHERS AND WORKERS TO RESUME THE PROCESS OF COMMON ACTION WHICH WAS REALISED IN FACT DURING THE DEMONSTRATION: Workers, high school pupils and students spontaneously resisted the police attacks together, with UNEF.

Against Police Repression

Against the Reactionary Press

Against the Bourgeois University

GENERAL STRIKE FROM MONDAY

until all our comrades are released: Support the demonstration in the Latin Quarter  
on Monday at 6.30 pm in your thousands!

Despite the police charges, 20,000 demonstrators manned the barricades and held the streets until 10 o'clock, when UNEF told them to disperse. Thousands of young workers fought alongside the students. On Tuesday, May 7, UNEF called another demonstration. This time 60,000 demonstrators marched across Paris from Place Denfert-Rocjereau to the Arc de Triomphe. The barrier which the Stalinist apparatus had raised between the workers and the students was beginning to crack. The slogan advanced by the OCI and the FER pointed the road: "500,000 workers to the Latin Quarter". This slogan was realised in the demonstration of May 13, which was the prelude to the General Strike.

Even the point of departure of the movement, which snow-balled to result in the General Strike, was prepared and started off by the methodical activity of the OCI. The book which Francois de Massot has devoted to the General Strike reports the facts in these words:

#### HOW THE GENERAL STRIKE WAS PREPARED

What were the particular demands of the Dassault workers in Sud-Aviation at Bordeaux? First, for full compensation for wages lost in the strike: no sackings to result from changes in labour costs; increases of 35 NF an hour all round. Second, about agency staffs to be hired by the firm; the problem concerned workers 'on loan' from employment agencies in the Nantes area, whose wages were very low and who have no guarantee of work. They had presented these demands to the management for weeks, and one-day strikes had followed one after another without result.

But at Sud-Aviation the revolutionary militants had re-grouped and taken action. Some of them, such as the Trotskyist militant-Yvon Rocton, found themselves entrusted by their trade union comrades with responsible positions at the head of the hourly-paid section - the workers' section - of the Force Ouvriere trade union at Sud-Aviation. Like other militants, Rocton had been excluded from the CGT because he defended his position in the union and defended the union against the threat which the policy of class-collaboration of the confederal leadership represented, the policy of one-day strikes or half-cock demonstrations, which demobilise and demoralise the membership. Rocton and other militants carried on their struggle in Force Ouvriere to re-unify the unions and to form a single centre on the basis of democracy, which is inseparable from the struggle for the independence of the trade unions from the state. Their struggle was directly linked to that of the militants who were defending the same orientation in the CGT and in the FEN. Together they had created CLADO and then taken action to form Worker' Alliance Committees.

These militants carried out their responsibilities to the full as trade union officers and as workers' delegates. Their section of Force Ouvriere was to fulfill the role which falls naturally to a trade union. At each stage the Force Ouvriere section informed all the workers about negotiations that were going on. It called them to discussions about methods of action and to place before them proposals about the forms of struggle and organisation which seemed to them to correspond to what needed to be done.

In this way, the Force Ouvriere section involved everyone in a public discussion about the means to be used to compel the employers to retreat. They proved that workers' democracy is not a utopian fiction, but an indispensable arm for the workers.

After the joint day of action on December 13, 1967, two hundred and seventy-one workers in Nantes, on the initiative of the Workers' Alliance Committee there, signed a letter addressed to the confederal trade union leaders:

"We believe that the return to the policy of one-day strikes, sectional and piecemeal strikes, is inadmissible...

This is why we demand that you prepare a strike on a very large scale, by calling meetings in every work-place, of workers to elect their committees to prepare the strike... We believe that it is indispensable, at the same time, that you break from all the structures by means of which the State tries to associate the trade unions with its decisions (such as CODER, the Commissions of the Plan, etc)"

The revolutionary militants at Sud-Aviation started from this orientation, in order to organise an effective reply to the employers and the Government. One hundred and

thirty-eight workers in Sud-Aviation signed a manifesto of aero workers, addressed to the engineering trade union federations and to all the aero factories. This manifesto demanded the preparation of the general strike in the aero industry; it opposed sackings; it called for 48 hours' pay for 40 hours' work and for retirement at sixty. It demanded that the strike be prepared by a democratic conference of workers in the industry, based on workers' meetings.

This proposition was put to the CGT and CFDT organisations at an inter-union meeting on January 15, 1968. On January 31, the Force Ouvriere hourly-paid section addressed this proposal by leaflet to the workers in the plant:

"Preparation of the General Strike by aero industry workers as the starting-point for the general strike of the whole working class. Let us begin with a general meeting at the Bouguenais plant."

The section continued to repeat these proposals. There was an inter-union meeting in Paris on March 22 of representatives of all the Sud Aviation plants. The plans of the management were clear. They would yield nothing. On the contrary, they would prepare sackings, starting with the Rochefort plant (800 workers), half of whom were to go before the end of the year. After the meeting, the trade union organisations re-affirmed their demands and concluded:

"Consequently, the trade union organisations will immediately consult the work-force, in every plant, to decide, jointly with them, the means to be employed so that the only useful solutions, those which it puts forward, will succeed, and so as to organise in the immediate future the defence of the workpeople and the factory at Rochefort, the first battle-ground on which to resist a policy which will surely become general if we do not defeat it."

The class-struggle militants favoured the stay-in strike as the means to force the employer to yield to their just demands.

But this agreement was not expressed in facts. On April 4, the Force Ouvriere section was induced to consult the workers by itself. 252 voting papers were completed. 22 were for repeated half-hour stoppages. 44 were for various forms of struggle. 59 were for a limited general stoppage and 127 were for an un-limited general stoppage. In the same week there was at last an inter-union consultation. 76% of the workers said that they were for a fight, divided almost equally between those who were for one-day strikes and those who were for an un-limited strike.

The short stoppages went on, but the management did not give way. The alternative was clear by the end of three weeks. The short stoppages had not led anywhere. The workers had either to get into a real fight, or to capitulate.

On May 9, the Force Ouvriere section drew the balance of the activities that had been undertaken. At the same time, it issued a call to battle:

There is now only one, single solution  
ALL - OUT STRIKE

The question has been put before the workers --

Everyone has had a chance to think about it

Now we must organise the strike

by setting up a strike committee

This is the way to organise the struggle  
and to widen out resistance

The fight of the Sud-Aviation workers  
is not their fight alone

It is the fight of all workers,  
teachers and students



AGAINST poverty, unemployment, sackings,  
low wages and repression

FOR Workers' Liberties

Nantes, May 9, 1968

The delegation of the Sud-Aviation workers gave their report and, on May 14, the work-force proceeded to action. They started an un-limited strike and occupied the plant. Their movement started the General Strike and, at the same time, summed up the general features of the strike. It started following May 13, when the working-class was gathered together in action to confront the police-state. It started from specific demands. These corresponded to the specific aspects of the general danger of down-grading and impoverishment which hung over the whole working class. These particular demands could be satisfied only through a general struggle. This struggle expressed the will of the workers, not the decisions of the summits of the workers' movement.

But at the same time, Sud-Aviation was an exception. The conditions in which the strike was prepared there were exceptional. We have dwelt upon these special aspects, because they provide the best possible introduction to the problem of the General Strike. This exception was soon to become the rule; it had to do so. We do not say that workers' democracy was completely applied within the limits of Sud-Aviation alone. It could not be so. But important successes were won at Sud-Aviation on the road to full success. They served as a mean to prepare for the greatest struggle that the French proletariat has yet experienced. (This is the end of the extract from Francois de Massot's book).

#### THE STALINIST APPARATUS ORGANISES PROVOCATIONS AGAINST THE OCI

The conditions which led to the General Strike of May - June 1968 were drawing together. But the Stalinist apparatus was shrivelling up, as it tried to immobilise the working-class and the youth, who were taking ever harder blows from De Gaulle. The importance of the OCI and of the vanguard which it organised round itself can be measured in a certain sense in relation to the bitterness of the growing attacks which the Stalinists mounted and of the provocations which it organised against the OCI. Amid the principal provocations which the Stalinist apparatus organised against the OCI in the course of the year preceding the General Strike was the campaign against the candidature of the OCI in a constituency in the Department of the Seine, which they denounced as a "fascist and a candidate of the Prefecture of the police." This could not result in a pogrom, however, because the OCI took the necessary political and organisational steps to prevent it.

In March 1967, "L'Humanite" and the Stalinist press, during the Rhodiaceta strike, violently attacked the militants of the OCI in Rhodiaceta, in the Lyon region and, in particular comrade Paul Duthel. The "crime" of these militants was to have organised resistance to the agreement to end the strike which the leaders had signed.

The workers assembled at the gates of the plant, to the number of several thousands, and booed the Stalinist leader, who was boasting of a "victory" which consisted of a 3.8% rise after 23 days on strike. They refused to go back to work, and "L'Humanite" wrote on March 23:

"The CRS cleared the approaches to the plant. The incident which gave rise to the excuse for the intervention of the police-forces which were sent to Lyon some days ago appear to have been worked out well in advance. The intervention in the strike of people not involved in it, such as the notorious Trotskyist, Duthel, together with two or three others, are in fact well-known to workers in the plant."

"L'Humanite" is grossly lying. There was no intervention by the CRS. It was the workers who refused to start work that day. As "Informations Ouvrieres" wrote:

"'L'Humanite' lies when it accuses Paul Duthel for intervening. At the moment when these events took place, Paul Duthel was teaching his class at L'Arbresle. The Trotskyists were in the strike. With numerous workers of every tendency, including members of the Communist Party, they expressed the will of thousands and thousands of workers in the Rhodia. They demanded the place in the class-struggle which they filled, and the workers of the vanguard recognised their place.

This is why 'L'Humanite' has to lie and to accuse the irreproachable revolutionary militant, Paul Duthel, of being a provocateur and of instigating an intervention by the police - AN INTERVENTION WHICH NEVER TOOK PLACE.

And the collusion of all the big bourgeois newspapers with 'L'Humanite' is as clear as day. There had to be talk of 'incidents' in order to explain why the police would have intervened. The tale about the police intervening was needed by the Stalinist Vareille, who writes at the dictation of Fajon, in order to accuse the Trotskyists of a provocation.

The Stalinist journal hopes to kill two birds with one stone. It hopes, on the one hand, to isolate the Trotskyists from the elements of the vanguard who are coming near to them. It hopes, at the same time, to re-assure the bourgeoisie that, if work did not re-start at Rhodiacta, that was no fault of the Communist Party. The Communist Party was pointing out to the bourgeoisie that it had kept its bargains; it had conducted itself as if it were a party of government."

But in the end the slander campaign went on even though the Stalinist apparatus had been able to break the strike and to get work re-started. The campaign was to end only when the militants of the OCI had succeeded in getting the support of trade unionists and of the teachers' unions in their denunciation of Stalinist methods.

The OCI organised a series of meetings in the provinces on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Russian Revolution. In several cities the Stalinist apparatus called for these meetings to be broken up. For example, the "Marseillaise" of December 15:

"The communists and their friends in Avignon will not tolerate such activities going on in their city".

None the less, the meeting did take place, thanks to the political and organisational measures which the OCI took. At Lyon a "commando" of eighty members of the Communist Party tried to break up the meeting and to take over the platform. In the end they were beaten back and driven out. But it was at Mountrouge (in Paris) that the attack was best organised and most brutal. On December 11, militants of "Revolution (for the revolutionary organisation of youth)" and of the OCI organised a Marxist Discussion Circle at the Trades Hall, to commemorate the revolution of October 1917. Even before the meeting began, forty leading members of the Communist Party came in wearing crash helmets. They arrived in Peugeot vans and several private cars and entered the meeting-hall. They were armed with truncheons, with pointed and curved bars of iron, with pieces of wood with nails sticking out, and attacked the first people to arrive, wounding many of them, for example, Bernard Bastien, 17½ years old, who was taken to hospital with his skull opened as the result of a blow with a pointed iron bar from behind, and B. Sluheck, a teacher and a member of SNES (the Secondary teachers' union), who was taken to hospital with a broken arm.

During May 1968, it was the CLER (the Liaison Committee of Revolutionary Students) which was to be accused in the press of "using terrorist methods in the UNEF and in the University". Under the pretext of getting away from these methods, the leadership of UNEF called a general meeting at Colombes, a municipality under Communist Party control, under the protection of guards provided by the Communist Party and, contrary to its tradition, behind closed doors.

"L'Humanite" wrote on March 15, 1968:

"The Trotskyists of the 'Liaison Committee of Revolutionary Students', who have recently perpetrated several acts of violence against the democratic students' organisations, tried to prevent this general meeting of UNEF from taking place. They got together several dozen of their 'shock troops' in front of the meeting place. But the militants of UNEF organised to defend their union, kept them at a distance and the work went ahead normally. Further, a motion was voted unanimously by the general meeting that they will publicly denounce the actions and the methods of the CLER, which are directed against the student movement and the workers' trade unions."

In reality, several of the organisations represented there had left the hall, refusing to take their seats in these conditions and hoping thereby to avoid any incident.

THE QUESTION OF POWER

The General Strike of May - June 1968 did not, then, break out like lightning in a clear sky. Its origins go back a long way. They lie in the incompatibility between Bonapartism of the Fifth Republic type and the continued existence of an organised workers' movement, of trade unions and parties. Despite the bureaucratic apparatuses and their orientation towards subjection to the bourgeois state, these organisations form the working-class as an independent, specific class. The historic function of the Fifth Republic was to destroy the workers' movement, to break up the working class into a cloud of atoms, which do not form a body and to subject the atoms to the centralised power of the bourgeoisie, the state. From the moment when the Fifth Republic was proved to be unable to do this, the explosion was inevitable.

The origins of the General Strike of May - June 1968 lie in the demonstration against the Debre Law, which attracted 500,000 demonstrators at Vincennes at the call of the FEN in 1960. They lie in the gigantic demonstration which accompanied the dead of Charonne to the Pere Lachaise cemetery on February 13, 1962. They lie in the miners' strike in March - April 1963. The Government then followed the line of trying to integrate the trade unions into the state. However, political relations were already no longer those of 1958, nor even those of before the miners' strike. The Government had to postpone its attack on the working-class, its frontal attack, that is. It tried to integrate the unions into the state with the participation of the bureaucratic apparatuses. None the less, though the apparatuses went a long way in this direction, the workers' organisations, the trade unions or, in another form, the parties, cannot as such be assimilated into the bourgeois state. At the end of the day, they have to be destroyed, so that the corporate state can be constructed from their fragments.

The General Strike was, as it were, worked out in the course of the class struggles of workers and youth against the state and the employers, from the miners' strike onwards. The needs and the aspirations of the masses came into conflict with the policies and the practices of the apparatuses. The masses were obliged, at one and the same time, to struggle to make use of their organisations. These are complex relationships. Within them the conscious, planned activity of revolutionary militants took its stand on the class-independence of the proletariat. It opened the perspective of struggle, class against class, against the Bonapartist state. This played a very important part, though one which cannot be measured, in the process of "working out" of the General Strike of May - June 1968.

What detonated the General Strike was the Government itself. It loosed its ferocious attack on the students, in the hope that the bureaucratic apparatuses and especially the Stalinist apparatus of the CGT and of the Communist Party would be effective in containing the working class and leaving the students isolated. When Pompidou retreated on

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the Struggles of the Working Class in France

The Renault Strike in 1947 by Denis Collin	£3
The General Strike in France: August 1953. by Denis Collin	£3
The General Strike and the Question of Power by Stephane Just	£10

Sunday, May 12 and announced on television on his return from abroad that the Sorbonne would be re-opened, all arrested or suspected demonstrators would be set free and that the demonstrators who had been sentenced would be brought to an appeal court which would free them too - it was already too late. The working class was already mobilised as a class. The apparatuses were obliged to call the 24 - hour general strike for Monday, May 13 and the demonstration which accompanied it, on which the programme of the General Strike was concentrated in one slogan: "Ten Years of De Gaulle is Enough!". Economic demands were, of course, also being raised, but it was for struggle against De Gaulle, against the Bonapartist state, against the Government and against the system that the General Strike was to take place in the course of the next few days.

It is not the aim of this article to go again over the history of the General Strike of May - June 1968. Readers of "La Verite" will turn to the excellent book by Francois De Massot, "The General Strike (May - June 1968)". This article is confined to showing how the political objective and the political demands were combined in the course of the strike. The slogan "Down with De Gaulle" seemed to disappear during the week following May 13. The strike was generalised and developed. The General Strike was for such demands as: "Down with the decree-laws! No wages under 100,000 old francs a month" etc. Yet the political content of the strike was unchanged. The Co-ordinating Committee for the Paris Region correctly published and distributed this leaflet on May 20:

REPEAL THE EMERGENCY DECREES  
 REPEAL THE FOUCHET REFORM  
 REPEAL THE CHANGES IN TRADE TRAINING  
 DOWN WITH THE FIFTH PLAN  
 FOR GUARANTEED JOBS  
 SKILLED WORKERS' PAY FOR SKILLED WORKERS  
 NO WAGES LESS THAN 1,000 NF A MONTH  
 (as the strikes at Renault have demanded)  
 FORTY-HOUR WEEK FOR ALL NOW

The working class has raised up its immense strength  
 It can win all these demands, if it stops work everywhere,  
 occupies the plants and raises the red flag

THE WORKING CLASS IN STRUGGLE MUST ORGANISE

We should form, in every factory, office, building site, faculty, school or college  
 OUR ELECTED STRIKE COMMITTEES

We should organise inter-occupational strike committees in every district  
 A central inter-occupational strike committee should be formed in every Department  
 Federate the strike committees locally, departmentally, nationally.

The struggle we have undertaken is not that of one factory, one firm or one occupation. It is the struggle of the entire working-class, which is rising to its feet as a class.

The work of the trade union centres will be united when they order a  
 GENERAL STRIKE UNTIL WE WIN  
 and set up THE NATIONAL CENTRAL GENERAL STRIKE COMMITTEE

This is the mobilisation of the exploited against their exploiters, against their state and their government, in the clear light of day.

DOWN WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF DE GAULLE AND POMPIDOU!

NO MORE GOVERNMENT BY CAPITALISTS!

However, three slogans should have been there which were not there. These are: "Ten Years of De Gaulle is Enough", "Down with De Gaulle" and "For a Communist Party and Socialist Party Government, without Ministers representing bourgeois organisations and parties".

The bureaucratic apparatuses and the workers' parties were to do their utmost to ensure that the General Strike would be an "economic" and not a "political" strike and, at first, that it should not be general. The trade union apparatuses refused to call for

the General Strike. They refused, even more resolutely, to call for to formation of a central strike committee, or even to form it, or to define its aim as being to bring down De Gaulle and place a workers' government in power. Yet the General Strike was a fact from May 20 onwards. As far as the Socialist and Communist Parties were concerned, they put down a "censure motion" on May 21 in the National Assembly, thereby recognising the regime, and accepting the fight on its ground. Their "censure motion" was defeated. In this way they helped to support the De Gaulle - Pompidou Government. During the same week, De Gaulle was to make his appeal to the nation, and there were fresh demonstrations where the shout went up, "Down with De Gaulle!"

The trade union apparatuses and the Government stretched every nerve to ensure that the General Strike was no more than a strike for economic demands. On May 25 the trade union centres met the representatives of the employers and the Government in the person of Pompidou and some ministers, in the so-called "Grenelle Conference". They negotiated for twenty-five hours and a "statement" was drawn up. This "statement" did not satisfy the fundamental demands which the masses had advanced. Seguy and Franchon, Stalinist leaders of the CGT, faced a gigantic meeting at Renault. They wanted to get the "statement" accepted. Thousands and thousands of workers replied: "Don't Sign", and the General Strike took a new leap forward. The Government vacillated. The question of power was being posed. On May 29 the CGT organised a demonstration, which the other trade union centres refused to support. There the Stalinist apparatus put forward the slogan of "A People's Government", as a precaution. Division was growing between workers' organisations and parties which all refused to advance the essential slogan, "Down with De Gaulle!" and "A Government of the Workers' Parties!". The workers and youth were awaiting from their leaders political slogans which did not come and the General Strike was marking time. It was then that De Gaulle, on May 29, made his remarkable disappearance, to "re-appear" on May 30 and to announce that the National Assembly would be dissolved and there would be new elections as soon as the strike ended. The leaders of the workers' organisations and parties quickly took up this "political perspective", using the election to dislocate the General Strike and to reduce it to a number of partial strikes. One firm after another, one plant after another, saw the trade union leaders in new "negotiations". They gradually crumbled the General Strike and liquidated it. The General Strike can be said to have ended by June 10.

#### A LONG DEATH - AGONY

The results of the elections to the legislature on June 23 and 30 are well known. They produced a National Assembly as blue as the police uniforms. With the General Strike betrayed and liquidated, hundreds of thousands of workers refused to take part in these "elections of betrayal", while the petty bourgeoisie lined up with De Gaulle.

None the less, the Fifth Republic had received a mortal blow. It had not fulfilled its function of breaking up, of atomising the working class as a class. On the contrary, the working class had risen up like a giant, with the youth at its side, despite all illusions and treacheries, and had rocked it on its foundations. In the following year De Gaulle made a supreme effort to take the reins back again. He made one final - and derisory - effort to establish the corporate state by means of a referendum, and, for the first time, a plebiscitary referendum turned out as a defeat for the executive power. De Gaulle had to resign.

But the Fifth Republic was not yet finished off or laid in its grave. It is already eleven years since the cry rang out: "Ten Years of De Gaulle is Enough!". The Fifth Republic has already lasted a decade since De Gaulle was compelled to resign. There are some who think that this is a very prolonged death - agony, and even question that the Fifth Republic received a mortal wound. The length of the death - agony of the Fifth Republic, in fact, only shows what problems are involved and what the consequences of its final collapse will be. For the resort to Gaullist Bonapartism has not simply been a historical aberration. It has been the expression of how French imperialism has to exist in its degeneration, that it has to find means to muzzle and to crush the proletariat. The bourgeoisie does not have at its disposal any other stable political regime with which to replace it. There is no other political form of class rule which "peacefully" succeed the Fifth Republic. Bastard Bonapartism had modelled the bourgeois state in a certain form. The death of the Fifth Republic will not result simply

simply in a change in the form of class-rule of the bourgeoisie, in a re-modelling of the bourgeois state. It will inevitably be a collapse and a dislocation of this state. It will lead inevitably to the emergence of the proletariat and the youth and of the exploited masses to occupy the stage of history... in a few words, it will lead to a revolutionary crisis, to proletarian revolution. Finally, the death-agony of the Fifth Republic cannot be separated from the linked crisis of imperialism and the parasitic bureaucracies, from the new period of the proletarian revolution which precisely opened in 1968 and the stage of this new period today. The collapse of the Fifth Republic and the opening of the revolutionary crisis in France will entirely de-stabilise the Europe of Yalta and Potsdam. Following the revolution in Portugal, it will give a gigantic impulse to the development of the proletarian revolution in Europe. Consequently the support which the bureaucratic apparatuses, and especially the Stalinist apparatuses in France, give to the Fifth Republic in its death-agony surpasses anything we can imagine. That is why it survives. But the length of this death-agony is becoming a supplementary factor in the decomposition of the state, in the crisis of the bourgeoisie and in the conflicts between the masses and the apparatuses and the internal contradictions within the apparatuses. The General Strike of May - June 1968 indeed came from far in the past, and the movement which will sweep away the Fifth Republic or which will surge up when it collapses also has distant origins in the General Strike of May - June 1968.

To sum up: once again the classical form of mobilisation of the working class as a class is on the order of the day in France - the General Strike. To prepare for it, to prepare oneself for it, requires an analysis of the processes by which the General Strike prepares itself, what is its content and what problems it poses.

After this article devoted to the gestation and preparation of the General Strike in May - June 1968, and that devoted to the General Strike of August 1953 in "La Verite" No. 590, of February 1980, which itself followed an article on the Renault strike in 1947, a further article will be devoted to the questions which are raised by the many general strikes which the working class has carried out and to the lessons which arise from them.

Stephane Just  
December 20, 1979