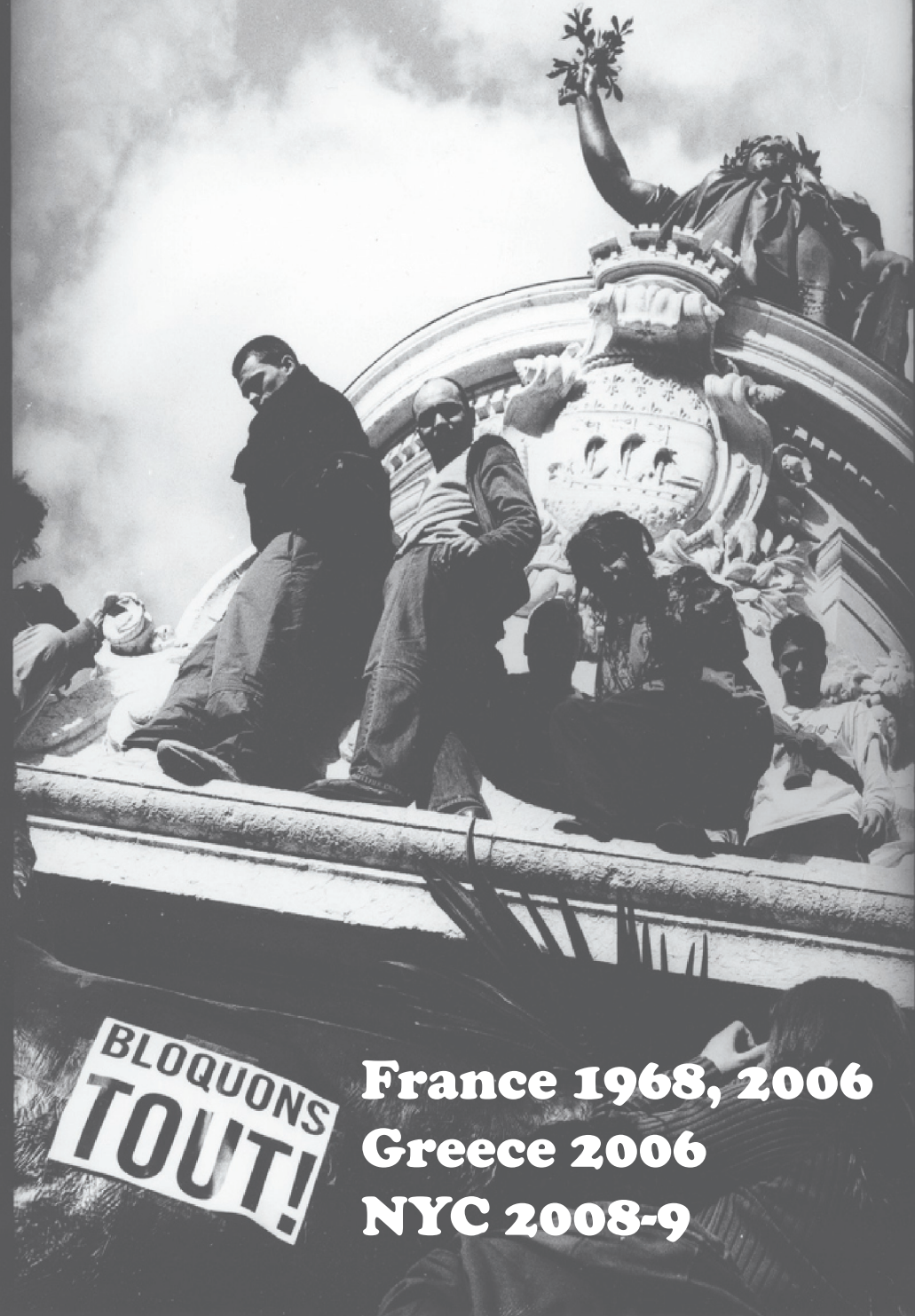


University Occupations



Printed by the *Inoperative Committee*
March 2009



France 1968, 2006
Greece 2006
NYC 2008-9

YOU SHOULD FEEL WHAT I FEEL YOU SHOULD TAKE WHAT I TAKE

In the spirit of March Madness, New York Fucking City announces a competitive occupation tournament to be enjoyed by all the gravediggers of the old world. It's already started, the crisis is here and the time is right to tear it all down. We'll call it *The Thing*; the shit is real.

HOW TO PLAY

Step 1: Look for existing conflicts in your area: a tuition increase, a fare hike, foreclosures, mass layoffs, etc. -exploit the tension. Or start from a need; do people need space to organize from, meet new people outside of the same old scene, or just hold parties?

Step 2: Take space, transform its uses, and make it a staging ground for further action. Occupy a university building, abandoned building, or workplace...shit, it's 2009: seize a condo; occupy in style!

Step 3: Wild out!

HOW TO GAIN POINTS:

- Restyle the interior and exterior with diligence (5pts)
- Exhibit great care in the manufacture of beautiful banners (10pts)
- Write thoughtful communiqués that carefully explain how the tiger claw of the active minority coincides with the objective struggle of the proletariat against capital (10pts)
- Build actual barricades, not embarrassing lines of chairs (10pts)
- Transform the uses of the space (20pts)
- Expand the field of action by seizing more territory and taking more buildings (100pts)
- Experiment with other forms of social subversion, introducing workplace sabotage and auto-reduction into everyday life. Food Not Bombs ends and proletarian shopping begins! (150pts)
- Generalize the conflict by superseding the immediate "issue," building lines of solidarity, disintegrating identities, and ripping open the fabric of capitalist time (200pts)
- Create new forms of life through communization (Unlimited Human Strike!)

**ABSTINENCE FROM THIS
COMPETITION WOULD
BE INTENSE AND
COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY.
DON'T BE A BABY!**

HOW TO LOSE POINTS:

- Write banal communiqués (-10pts)
- Make shoddy banners (-10pts)
- Wear college sweatpants. OMG WTF! (-10pts)
- Dumpster slogans, chants or fashion from the 1960s. Honestly! (-25pts)
- Use demands as simply a means to an end (-50pts)
- End the occupation in a shameful way (-100pts)
- Undertake actions that fail to rupture the facade of normalcy (-100pts)
- Bureaucratize the occupation by forming subcommittees, creating posts, and holding endless meetings (-200pts)
- Reproduce commodity relations (Total Disqualification!)

**To the utter fucking impossibility of the continuation
of capitalism for even another fucking second,
NYC MARCH 2009**



Workers, youth and students demonstrate, riot over economic crisis. Paris, March 20, 1999

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New School in Exile holds press conference, Feb 12, NYC

France, 1968



Paris street, May 1968

were originally battling or else reviewing a list of accomplishments that are so watered down the ink displaying them has run and smeared unintelligibly across the paper.

“The majority” cited by the obedient as being alienated by direct action is a mere weapon of the status quo. In this vile social order, our senses are colonized by the fear (the hatred!) of thought and action that truly charts its own channels. Indeed, on a macro level, this explains why many who find little benefit in the preservation of the present order will be reluctant or even spiteful of those efforts that disregard the typical ruts.

When a movement questions the unquestionable, travels beyond the worn routes, then the subconscious and conscious--the deceived and sincere--preservers of the old order must rail: “Don’t alienate the majority! Don’t go too far! What about a broad base? What about the long arc of progress?” Some of these preservers might even masquerade as radicals.

It is necessary to clear the air of these typical pollutants, but it is also crucial to advance, just as in many ways the NYU occupation amplified the empowering echoes of the earlier one in The New School. The indifferent, the doubters, the seated radicals, the contented liberals, must be cast aside as we fearlessly charge for the unattainable horizon, revealing evermore humane, free, terrains of struggle.

The scene made my eyes glassy. Early in the second morning of the NYU occupation, hundreds of restive protestors in solidarity with those inside chanted, sang, danced, shouted, and, at the height of the chaotic crescendo, pressed against the barricades of the heavily armed NYPD--who were protecting the entrance to the building--in a brazen effort to join the occupation. Police batons cracked and pepper spray spewed in streams, but they were not deterred, continuing to push forward without deference for badges or titles. It wasn’t until the cops started arresting and violently wrenching protestors over the barricades that the crest was broken. When the crowd reverted to singing and dancing and simple mischief, you could see--feel!--their simmering power if you squinted hard enough.

We are the strengthening enemy of channeled order. We are the new ground that will allow an infinite diversity of pathways. We are building a revolutionary situation.

bring. For both, it brought more occupied space, incredible media coverage, large influxes of students, and solidarity protests and actions outside that shut down entire city blocks! What leverage might the day after that bring the next occupation? Personally, I am in favor of seeing an occupation as a victory in itself, perhaps not even making demands--instead listing grievances--as the collective attempts to expand the occupied space and reclaim it for grassroots power. But this is hardly a break from those who explode the possible through unrealistic demands.



New York University's Kimmel Hall, occupied. Feb 20, 2009 NYC

Finally, the proper channels are those means by which subordinates are permitted to affect the general goings-on. Rationalized privilege, apathy and subjugation to custom aside, there is little doubt as to their true nature. In democracy, they are the brilliant constructions of those in power. All of these channels begin, end and course through the orifices of the ruling elite. They are co-optation manifest--genius because reform is indeed possible through them, but only reform which does not threaten or disrupt business as usual. These power-serving organs through which the lowly voice must be heard in order to be "democratic," "moral" and "righteous" (according to the conventional wisdom) are, by definition, choked by the powers that grip them. Those who want total transformative change through these appropriate channels find their efforts so diluted and compromised that by the time victory is declared, either they themselves are at the helm of the same



Outside the NYU occupation. Feb 19, 2009, NYC

Exemplary Character of the University Occupation

from *Worker-Student Action Committees*
by Fredy Perlman & Roger Gregoire, 1968

Liberated Censier : A Revolutionary Base

To understand why university students in an industrially developed society are "enraged," it is essential to understand that the students are not enraged about the courses, the professors, the tests, but about the fact that the "education" prepares them for a certain type of social activity : it is this activity they reject. "We refuse to be scholars cut off from social reality. We refuse to be used for the profit of directors. We want to do away with the separation between the work of executing and the work of thinking and organizing." [5] By rejecting the roles for which the education forms them, the students reject the society in which these roles are to be performed. "We reject this society of repression" in which "explicitly or implicitly, the University is universal only for the organization of repression." [6] From this perspective, a teacher is an apologist for the existing order, and a trainer of servants for the capitalist system; an engineer or technician is a servant who is super-trained to perform highly specialized tasks for his master; a manager is an agent of exploitation whose institutional position gives him the power to think and decide for others. "In the present system, some work and others study. And we've got a division of social labor, even an intelligent one. But we can imagine a different system..." [7] This division and sub-division of social labor, perhaps necessary at an earlier stage of economic development, is no longer accepted. And if growing specialization is associated with the birth and "progress" of capitalist society (as was argued, for example, by Adam Smith), then the rejection of specialization by future specialists marks the death of capitalist society.

Students have discovered that the division of social tasks among specialized groups is at the root of alienation and exploitation. The alienation of political power by all members of society, and the appropriation of society's political power (through election, inheritance or conquest) by a specialized ruling class, is the basis for the division of society into rulers and ruled. The alienation (sale) of productive labor by producers, and the appropriation (purchase) of the labor and its products by owners of means of production (capitalists), is the basis for the division of society into bosses and workers,

managers and employees, exploiters and exploited. The alienation of reflective activity by most members of society and its appropriation by a specialized corps of “intellect workers” is the basis for the division of society into thinkers and doers, students and workers. The alienation of creative activity by most people, and its appropriation by “artists,” divides society into actors and audience, creators and spectators. The specialized “professions” and “disciplines” represent the same pattern : a particular economic task or social activity is relegated to a particular individual who does nothing else, and the rest of the community is excluded from thinking about, deciding or participating in the performance of a task which affects the entire community.

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

* * *

“On Saturday, May 11, at 6 in the evening, militants of the May 3 Action Committees occupy the annex to the Faculty of Letters, the Censier Center. All night long and on the days that follow, the atmosphere is similar to that of the “night of the barricades,” not in terms of violence, but in terms of the self-organization, the initiative, the discussion.” [8] The university ceases to be a place for the “transmission of a cultural heritage,” a place for training managers, experts and trainers, a place for brainwashing brainwashers.

The capitalist university comes to an end. The ex-university, or rather the building, becomes a place for collective expression. The first step of this transformation is the physical occupation of the building. The second step is discussion, the expression of ideas, information, projects, the creative self-expression of the occupants. “In the large auditoriums the discussion is continuous. Students participate, and also professors, assistants, people from the neighborhood, high schoolers, young workers.” [9] Expression is

The second critique is connected to the first in that it questions the drive and seriousness of the occupants. There is a Christian ring to it: if you do an action that disrupts the normal flow of an institution, you should drop to your knees and accept your punishment or else self-flagellate because you have sinned--if we are even to accept that a righteous action is a sin! Punish me! the students should scream if they are committed enough. For those minimally concerned with winning a long struggle, why would you not build an exit strategy into a single action? When dealing with a private university whose administration is reluctant to involve the police for PR reasons, the amnesty demand becomes more relevant. Since the power of security guards is fragile at best, their bosses will be more likely to sue for peace and cave in.

The complaint against amnesty implies that the students were cowardly. No further reasons for this are issued because no facts support it. It is roundly untrue! When facing violent security guards, threatened expulsion, a pathetic food supply, dwindling energy, and the constantly stated assurance by the administration that if they just left all would be forgiven, the occupants held fast as one! Show me a mainstream journalist who dares suggest these students were cowards, and I will show you a face that belongs in the dictionary under “gutless”!

Two of the loftier demands: “That the university donate all excess supplies and materials in an effort to rebuild the University of Gaza; that NYU signs a contract guaranteeing fair labor practices for all NYU employees at home and abroad. This contract will extend to subcontracted workers, including bus drivers, food service employees and anyone involved in the construction, operation and maintenance at any of NYU’s non-U.S. sites.”

The third cable’s lack of imagination is crippling and self-defeating. The Take Back NYU! demands were not at all in the ether, but again let us play with the critique by accepting its furrowed brows: Why not demand the moon? It is inspiring and empowering to aim for the intangible, working to bridge the impossible with the possible. An occupation itself is impossible. This is shown by the astounding amount of press that both occupations received when each lasted less than two days! An occupation, in challenging authorities in ways to which they are not accustomed--in ways which challenge their very existence--opens vistas previously unseen by the most astute activist. In the first night of both occupations, spirits and numbers were low. Defeat was painted on the walls. No one imagined the strength the next day would



Security tries to stop more students from entering the NYU occupation. He fails. Feb 19th, 2009

contagious. People who have never expressed ideas before, who have never spoken in front of professors and students, become confident in their ability. It is the example of others speaking, analyzing, expressing ideas, suggesting projects, which gives people confidence in their own ability. “The food service,” for example, “is represented at the meetings by a young comrade : he’s thirteen, maybe fourteen. He organizes, discusses, takes part in the auditoriums. He was behind the barricades. His action and his behavior are the only answer to the drivel about high-schoolers being irresponsible brats.” [10]

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

Within the occupied university, expression becomes action; the awareness of one’s ability to think, to initiate, to decide, is in fact an awareness of one’s ability to act. The occupants of the university become conscious of their collective power : “we’ve decided to make ourselves the masters.” [11] The occupants no longer follow orders, they no longer obey, they no longer serve. They express themselves in a general assembly, and the decisions of the assembly are the expression of the will of all its members. No other decisions are valid; no other authority is recognized. “The students and workers who fought on the barricades will not allow any force whatever to stop them from expressing themselves and from acting against the capitalist university, against the society dominated by the bourgeoisie.” [12] This awareness of the ability to express oneself, this consciousness of collective power, is itself an act of de-alienation : “You can no longer sleep quietly once you’ve suddenly opened your eyes.” [13] People are no longer the playthings of external forces; they’re no longer objects; they’ve suddenly become conscious subjects. And once their eyes are open, people are not about to close them again : their passivity and dependence are negated, annihilated, and nothing but a force which breaks their will can reimpose the passivity and dependence.

With the New School and NYU Student Occupations!

Tim Hearin
2009

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

Consciousness of collective power is the first step toward the appropriation of social power (but only the first step, as will be shown below. Conscious of their collective power, the university occupants, workers and students, begin to appropriate the power to decide, they begin to learn to run their own social activities. The process of political de-alienation begins; the university is de-institutionalized; the building is transformed into a place which is run by its occupants. There are no “specialists” or “responsibles.” The community is collectively responsible for what takes place, and for what doesn’t take place, within the occupied building. Formerly specialized social activities are integrated into the lives of all members of the community. Social tasks are no longer performed either because of direct coercion or because of the indirect coercion of the market (i.e. the threat of poverty and starvation). As a result, some social activities, like hair dressing and manicuring, are no longer performed at all. Other tasks, like cooking, sweeping the rooms, cleaning the toilets -- tasks performed by people who have no other choice in a coercive system -- are left undone for several days. The occupation shows signs of degeneration : the food is bad, the rooms are filthy, the toilets are unusable. These activities become the order of the day of the general assembly : everyone is interested in their efficient performance, and no one is institutionally coerced to perform these tasks. The general assembly is responsible for their performance, which means everyone is responsible. Committees of volun

With laudable exceptions, the myopic mainstream replied to the occupations in The New School and NYU in December and February, respectively, with scorn and dismissal. Four primary cables supported the convenient network of complaints submitted by these sycophants of prevailing power structures: First, the occupants are the sons and daughters of privilege and are therefore ungrateful, unworthy. Next, the push for amnesty as a salient non-negotiable demand proves that they are not dedicated revolutionaries. Third, the demands made by the occupants were unrealistic. Last--and most infuriating--the rejection of the proper channels of student participation is not only evidence of the occupants’ hatred of democracy, but of their recklessness and irrationality.

The first armchair critique is simply weird. A strong number of the students who were inside are spiraling deep into debt since the bank, and not their parents, pays their tuition. Others were only able to attend university because of good scholarship packages. If this is not good enough for those more concerned with identity than action, many of the organizers in the occupations were from low-income communities--a good portion of these were of color. But let us pretend that this is not a distraction and that all the students inside were tremendously privileged. Is there any substance to this point besides the understandable visceral reaction against people of privilege? Those who greatly benefit from the prevailing order are especially trained to wield its tools for self-advancement. This was precisely the opposite of what happened in the occupation, a decidedly anti-establishment action; those students of privilege had every reason to use the tools already in place as opposed to making their own. All that remains is the point that since they are privileged, they are not risking anything--they can always “call daddy.” If this is true--which it is not, since many students face suspension and others criminal charges--is the only solution for a privileged student whose blood boils for true justice to hang her head and pout, doing nothing in the face of a rotten institution? Anyone who is not hurling insults for its own sake can see the absurdity of this claim.

outside. (A banal meta-reflection, the cameras and journalists who were inside with us filming and reporting put an immediate stop to police brutality when the cops realized they were being recorded).

4. Security guards are not on your side. We can argue for days about whether they are fellow workers--which is an irrelevant argument anyway--but despite your friendship with a security guard, or the guard not being happy with his union contract, or the guard claiming he is on your side, he is not. Sure you can crack jokes with him and talk about your common music interests, but open your eyes when the moment is not trivial. He will push against the barricades. He will tackle you. He will rip your clothes. He will call the cops on you. That is his job. I think of economic conscripts, GIs in Iraq. Yes, they might bring candy to kids in the street. They might hate President Bush. They might even hate the military-industrial complex. But when there is resistance to their presence, they will be ordered to snuff it out. In order to keep their job, they must obey. This is not to say that soldiers or security can never be on your side, but it would require them doing precisely the opposite of what is required of them.

One more comment on this. There was a security guard during the occupation who was also a student. Some RSU members were friends with him, buddying up with the guy and even inviting him in at points. But what happened on the last night when we propped open a fire door and let in scores of supporters and students? This very same security guard who was "just a fellow worker" was seen tackling students trying to get on the right side of the barricades.

5. Ever-expanding occupation is an extremely effective tactic for revolution.

teers are formed. A Kitchen Committee improves the quality of the meals; the food is free : it is provided by neighborhood committees and by peasants. A service of order charges itself with maintaining clean toilets stocked with toilet-paper. Each action committee sweeps its own room. The tasks are performed by professors, students and workers. At this point all of the occupants of Censier are workers. There are no longer upper and lower class jobs; there are no longer intellectual and manual tasks, qualified labor and unqualified labor; there are only socially necessary activities.

An activity which is considered necessary by a handful of occupants becomes the basis for the formation of an action committee. Each person is a thinker, an initiator, an organizer, a worker. Comrades are being seriously injured by cops in the street fights : a floor of Censier is transformed into a hospital; doctors and medical students care for the patients; others without medical experience help, cooperate and learn. A large number of comrades have babies and as a result cannot take part in activities which interest them : the comrades unite to form a nursery. The action committees need to print leaflets, announcements, reports : mimeograph machines and paper are found, and a free printing service is organized. Townspeople -- observers and potential participants -- stream into Censier constantly and are unable to find their way around the complex social system which has started to develop within the building : an information window is maintained at the entrance and information offices are maintained on each floor to orient the visitors. Many militants live far from Censier : a dormitory is organized.

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

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

The means of violence produced by a highly developed industry are still controlled by the capitalist State. And the Censier occupants are aware that the power of the State will not be broken until control over these industrial

activities passes to the producers : they “are convinced that the struggle cannot be concluded without the massive participation of the workers.” [14] The armed power of the State, the power which negates and threatens to annihilate the power of collective creation and self-organization manifested in Censier, can only be destroyed by the armed power of society. But before the population can be armed, before the workers can take control of the means of production, they must become aware of their ability to do so, they must become conscious of their collective power. And this consciousness of collective power is precisely what the students and workers acquired after they occupied Censier and transformed it into a place for collective expression. Consequently, the occupation of Censier is an exemplary action, and the central task of the militants in Censier becomes to communicate the example. All the self-organized activities revolve around this central task. Former classrooms become workshops for newly formed action committees; in every room projects are suggested, discussed, and launched; groups of militants rush out with a project, and others return to initiate a new one.

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

Censier exists as a place and as an example. Workers, students, professors, townspeople come to the place to learn, to express themselves, to become conscious of themselves as subjects, and they prepare to communicate the example to other sections of the population and to other parts of the world. Foreign students organize a general assembly to “join the struggle of their French comrades and give them their unconditional support.” Realizing that “the struggle of their French comrades is only an aspect of the international struggle against capitalist society and against imperialism,” [15] the foreign students prepare to spread the example abroad. East European students express their solidarity and send the news to their comrades at home. A U.S. group forms an Action Committee of the American Left, and they “plan to establish a news link-up with the U.S.A.” [16]



The New School, Dec 17, 2008

Most important of all, Censier’s main contribution to the revolutionary

we continued the inspiring example of the workers in Chicago and the anarchists throughout Greece.

2. While democratic consensus should be the watchword of a revolutionary situation--it was a crucial facet of our decision-making inside the cafeteria--direct action should not always wait for mass confirmation before being initiated. In our case, deliberation often took hours when there was an immediate concern at hand; and there was the problem of the newer, more liberal elements who did not have a clear-eyed conception of the occupation. Any further direct action would have been blocked.

On several occasions, a few of us had to bolster or defend a barricade without popular consensus. When we took the entrance/exit, we did not wait for popular consensus. Our spectacular midnight ruse did not wait for popular consensus--in fact, in a vote it was shot down. This is philosophically problematic, I realize, and I am troubled by it. All I can say is that moves should be made to ensure that the consequences of a direct action should minimally affect those comrades who do not support it, and should never put them in harm's way. Now, if your enemy does not support it, that probably means you're on the right track.

3. The physical barricades--desks, tables, dumpsters, planks of wood, etc.-are merely one of two primary components of successful defense, and perhaps the weaker of the two. The physical barricades saved us multiple times. This is fact. However, when the NYPD were committed to smashing our barricades, they did so, and quickly, like when they physically extricated us from our barricaded fire exit. The second component is outside support and solidarity that is won through dissemination of your cause and actions. The media we received garnered wide popular support from liberal faculty members in other American schools to students in Mexico to Greek anarchists who did direct actions in shows of solidarity with us. It would have been even more of a public relations disaster if the NYPD mass-arrested 150 students. Outside support was too strong; the sympathetic public eye was focused on us! In fact, for many hours our front door was not barricaded physically because we knew we were too connected to vigorous outside support to be raided. I should note here that, in addition to the direct focus of your cause, it's also critical to expand your solidarity, connect the dots, between you and other movements.

Most apparently, an important reason why the NYPD did not storm our fortified cafeteria on the last night is because of the massive demonstration

movement, the worker-student action committees, are formed. "Workers" . . . "To destroy this repressive system which oppresses all of us, we must fight together. Some worker-student action committees have been created for this purpose." [17] The formation of the worker-student committees coincides with the outbreak of a wildcat strike: "In the style of the student demonstrators, the workers of Sud-Aviation have occupied the factory at Nantes." [18]

Notes

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

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

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

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

[9] "L'Occupation," Action, May 13, 1968, p. 7.

[10] "L'Occupation," Action, May 13, 1968, p. 7.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[18] Le Monde, May 16, 1968.



Students in Paris, May 68

These rules are by no means definitive. While I myself am an Anarchist who was pushing for more direct actions to expand our space, insofar as we were numerically and strategically capable, I encourage healthy debate and criticism of my conclusions.

1. Limited negotiation is fine in terms of winning explicit concessions, but in order to have negotiations, you must have bargaining power, and this requires bold direct action. This belief, this mode of resistance, was the reason for our success. Despite the political inclinations of many of our well-intentioned and intelligent comrades in the New School in Exile (and despite their ever-present reluctance), it was the taking of the cafeteria, the blocking of the doors, the control of the building, that was our power. Of course, our aforementioned “political” comrades celebrated each and every direct action vigorously after the fact, realizing the terms of negotiation had just been changed in our favor, despite their initial resistance to it, saying things like “it’s too disorganized; it’s too brazen; it’s too illegal?”—it’s too this or that. Even our last action, when we linked the wonderful movement outside to us inside by the opening of a fire door at midnight, changed the status of the ongoing negotiations in our favor. This was said before us by one of our own negotiators, who herself was not necessarily pro-direct action.

It goes without saying that negotiations are meaningless if you’re bold enough to topple those who would negotiate with you, and this end goal should always be kept in mind for those who want a radically better world. The ultimate power of authorities cannot be abolished through negotiation.

Forgive the platitude, but you must dare to win. Confident but collected, brazen but not reckless, direct action is a primary weapon of revolt. Do not wait for the authorities to give you permission. At the outset, we did not wait for their permission, and that impatience was the engine of our progress. Before that, we were stalled. Remember: the reason why we resorted to an increasingly provocative and popular occupation was because the words, the negotiations, of faculty were meaningless. Their vote of no confidence was mocked by Bob Kerrey’s comments to the New York Times that the only votes he cared about were those of his trustees. The students were not even allowed into meetings concerning the No Confidence vote. We were only taken seriously when we dared. We were only taken seriously when we barricaded the cafeteria, when we controlled the entrance/exit, when we repeatedly disrupted operations in 65 5th avenue and elsewhere, contrary to the orders of police, of New School authorities. For that, we won important concessions and further destroyed the reputation of Bob Kerrey. For that,

Rules of Thumb Learned by An Occupant of the New School in Exile

Tim Hearin
2008

For brevity, I'm not going to give the background of the occupation. Two great sites to learn about it: <http://newschoolinexile.com> and <http://newschoolinexileblog.blogspot.com>

Besides a 20 or so core of extremely devoted students, the demographics (and actual numbers) were in constant flux. Excuse the labels, but broadly, if there were 100 students at a given moment, roughly 25 were Anarchists or revolutionaries of some sort committed to serious (sometimes spontaneous) direct action to achieve our goals. 40 were members of the Radical Student Union (formerly Students for a Democratic Society), were loosely affiliated with them, or whose politics generally fell in line with their pro-negotiation, "Just reason it out with the authorities" attitude. This is not to say that Anarchists spurned negotiations--I did not. Or that RSU members scorned the many direct actions in the occupation--though, I must write here, from the beginning, many prominent members were against the occupation, then against staying after the first night, then against taking control of the entrance/exit, then against our spectacular midnight ruse in the last few hours of the occupation that not only linked the wild supportive demonstration outside with us inside, but also breathed vastly new energy and power into our occupation, calling many of these successful and bold moves, among other things, "Custeristic". In fact I successfully defended a makeshift barricade with the fierce help of two fellow occupants who were RSU members. I am proud to call them comrades. The lines are somewhat blurred.

Finally, 35 were left liberals who were explicitly against direct action, even though, ironically, the entire occupation was predicated on direct action. Most joined after the initial occupation, probably believing our occupied space was "just a study space," or that "the authorities were permitting us to be there," as opposed to knowing it was us who made it so. To my knowledge, none in this group was among the 20 or so core of students mentioned above. I am critical of the latter two groups, but believe me when I write that even being there was a feat in itself, and I am sincerely thrilled they were bold enough to join.

Documents produced by the Situationist International or groups the Situationists were involved with during May 1968 in France.

- 1] Communiqué
- 2] Watch Out for Manipulators! Watch Out for Bureaucrats!
- 3] Slogans To Be Spread Now by Every Means Telegrams
- 4] Report on the Occupation of the Sorbonne
- 5] For the Power of Workers Councils

1. Communiqué

Comrades,

Considering that the Sud-Aviation factory at Nantes has been occupied for two days by the workers and students of that city, and that today the movement is spreading to several factories (Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne in Paris, Renault in Cléon, etc.), THE SORBONNE OCCUPATION COMMITTEE calls for the immediate occupation of all the factories in France and the formation of Workers Councils.

Comrades, spread and reproduce this appeal as quickly as possible.

Sorbonne, 16 May 1968, 3:30 pm

2. Watch Out for Manipulators! Watch Out for Bureaucrats!

Comrades,

No one must be unaware of the importance of the GA [general assembly] this evening (Thursday, May 16). Over the last two days several individuals, recognizable from having previously been seen peddling their various party lines, have succeeded in sowing confusion and in smothering the GAs under a barrage of bureaucratic manipulations whose crudeness clearly demonstrates the contempt they have for this assembly.

This assembly must learn to make itself respected or disappear. Two points must be discussed before anything else:

WHO CONTROLS THE SECURITY MARSHALS? whose disgusting role is intolerable.

WHY IS THE PRESS COMMITTEE -- which dares to censor the communiqués that it is charged to transmit to the news agencies -- composed of apprentice journalists who are careful not to disappoint the ORTF [national radio-television] bosses so as not to jeopardize their future job possibilities?

Apart from that: Considering that the workers are beginning to occupy several factories in France, FOLLOWING OUR EXAMPLE AND WITH THE SAME RIGHT WE HAVE, the Sorbonne Occupation Committee issued a statement approving of this movement at 3:00 this afternoon. The central problem of this evening's GA is therefore to declare itself by a clear vote supporting or disavowing this appeal of its Occupation Committee. If it disavows the appeal it will have put itself on record as reserving for students a right that it refuses to the working class; and in that case it is clear that it will no longer want to concern itself with anything but a Gaullist reform of the university.

OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE
PEOPLE'S FREE SORBONNE UNIVERSITY
16 May 1968, 6:30 pm

3. Slogans To Be Spread Now by Every Means

(leaflets, announcements over microphones, comic strips, songs, graffiti, balloons on paintings in the Sorbonne, announcements in theaters during films or while disrupting them, balloons on subway billboards, before making love, after making love, in elevators, each time you raise your glass in a bar):

OCCUPY THE FACTORIES

POWER TO THE WORKERS COUNCILS

ABOLISH CLASS SOCIETY

DOWN WITH SPECTACLE-COMMODITY SOCIETY

ABOLISH ALIENATION

TERMINATE THE UNIVERSITY

New York City, 2008-9



Banner hung outside the New School during the occupation in December, 2008 NYC.

capital has nothing else to offer us as a solution apart from introducing exams in order for one to get a medical specialty, together with a system of continuously evaluating working doctors. One can advance when they deserve it. Deserve what? A reward for being more productive for capital. Exhaustive alienated labour in the school means (not for everyone) passing the exams and becoming a resident; becoming a resident means (for everyone) exhaustive alienated labour in the hospital.

Sixth myth: A myth that includes all myths.

In order to conclude; we are not concerned with any discussion about the knowledge provided by the university. We don't seek for an alien, dead, indifferent, incomprehensible knowledge facing us, with ourselves just absorbing it. We are not concerned with any discussion about improving the democratic institutions of this society. We don't desire to be alone, isolated individuals with our relations mediated by money, images or voting. We are not concerned with any discussion about the way our representatives could correspond better to our demands. We don't want to be spectators. We are not concerned with any discussion about the way our labour could be organized in a different way. We don't want to work. We don't want to be fragmented: doctors, workers, citizens, consumers, men, women, now working, later entertaining ourselves and once in a while voting in procedures separated from the unceasing movement of life. We are concerned with turning our life into a unified and creative experience. In order to manage this we must abolish this university and the rest of the commodity society.

“We've made our body a vast graveyard of murdered desires and anticipations; we abandon the most important, the most essential things, like playing and talking with kids and animals, with flowers and trees, playing with each other and being happy, making love, enjoying nature, the beautiful products of human hand and mind, gently diving deep inside ourselves, getting to know ourselves and people next to us...”

-Chronis Missios, Smile, man... What's so damn hard?

With regards from AUTH's Medical School's occupation,
Luther Blissett

Footnotes:

[1] From the editorial of Blaumachen no.1, June 2006

[2] Let's think how far this conception is from every minister's statement that “He is responsible for being unemployed. He hasn't tried hard enough.”

HUMANITY WON'T BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS HUNG WITH THE GUTS OF THE LAST CAPITALIST

DEATH TO THE COPS

FREE ALSO THE 4 GUYS CONVICTED FOR LOOTING DURING THE MAY 6TH RIOT

OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S FREE SORBONNE UNIVERSITY

16 May 1968, 7:00 pm

Telegrams

PROFESSOR IVAN SVITAK PRAGUE CZECHOSLOVAKIA THE OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S FREE SORBONNE SENDS FRATERNAL GREETINGS TO COMRADE SVITAK AND OTHER CZECHOSLOVAKIAN REVOLUTIONARIES STOP LONG LIVE THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS STOP HUMANITY WON'T BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST CAPITALIST IS HUNG WITH THE GUTS OF THE LAST BUREAUCRAT STOP LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM

ZENGAKUREN TOKYO JAPAN LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE OF THE JAPANESE COMRADES WHO HAVE OPENED COMBAT SIMULTANEOUSLY ON THE FRONTS OF ANTI-STALINISM AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM STOP LONG LIVE FACTORY OCCUPATIONS STOP LONG LIVE THE GENERAL STRIKE STOP LONG LIVE THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS STOP HUMANITY WON'T BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS HUNG WITH THE GUTS OF THE LAST CAPITALIST STOP OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S FREE SORBONNE

POLITBURO OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE USSR THE KREMLIN MOSCOW SHAKE IN YOUR SHOES BUREAUCRATS STOP THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS WILL SOON WIPE YOU OUT STOP HUMANITY WON'T BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS HUNG WITH THE GUTS

OF THE LAST CAPITALIST STOP LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE OF
THE KRONSTADT SAILORS AND OF THE MAKHNOVSHCHINA
AGAINST TROTSKY AND LENIN STOP LONG LIVE THE 1956
COUNCILIST INSURRECTION OF BUDAPEST STOP DOWN WITH
THE STATE STOP LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY MARXISM
STOP OCCUPATION COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S FREE SOR-
BONNE

POLITBURO OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY GATE OF
CELESTIAL PEACE PEKING SHAKE IN YOUR SHOES BUREAU-
CRATS STOP THE INTERNATIONAL POWER OF THE WORKERS
COUNCILS WILL SOON WIPE YOU OUT STOP HUMANITY WON'T
BE HAPPY TILL THE LAST BUREAUCRAT IS HUNG WITH THE
GUTS OF THE LAST CAPITALIST STOP LONG LIVE FACTORY
OCCUPATIONS STOP LONG LIVE THE GREAT CHINESE PROLE-
TARIAN REVOLUTION OF 1927 BETRAYED BY THE STALINIST
BUREAUCRATS STOP LONG LIVE THE PROLETARIANS OF CAN-
TON AND ELSEWHERE WHO HAVE TAKEN UP ARMS AGAINST
THE SO-CALLED PEOPLE'S ARMY STOP LONG LIVE THE
CHINESE WORKERS AND STUDENTS WHO HAVE ATTACKED
THE SO-CALLED CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE MAOIST
BUREAUCRATIC ORDER STOP LONG LIVE REVOLUTIONARY
MARXISM STOP DOWN WITH THE STATE STOP OCCUPATION
COMMITTEE OF THE PEOPLE'S FREE SORBONNE

17 May 1968

4. Report on the Occupation of the Sorbonne

The occupation of the Sorbonne that began Monday, May 13, has opened a new period in the crisis of modern society. The events now taking place in France foreshadow the return of the proletarian revolutionary movement in all countries. The movement that had already advanced from theory to struggle in the streets has now advanced to a struggle for control of the means of production. Modernized capitalism thought it had finished with class struggle -- but it's started up again! The proletariat supposedly no longer existed -- but here it is again.

By surrendering the Sorbonne, the government hoped to pacify the stu

labour market; nobody believes that higher education has such fairy aims as broadening one's horizons, creating "renaissance men" or other such crap reminding of Plato's Academy (for the lovers of antiquity we should only remind that in ancient Athens there had not only been those nice guys -male of course- debating during the procedures of direct democracy, but many, too many slaves as well, who would pleasantly piss upon the gates of the "ideal society"). On the one hand, university produces knowledge necessary for the reproduction of waged labour relations (new technology, the ideological mist of an exploitative society etc). On the other, new workers are produced furnished with those attributes that make them more exploitable for their future employers (unskilled, flexible, categorized and of course compromised with capitalist reality - the new law is just to complete this condition).

What is well hidden is that university studies are labour, not just potentially labour. We are already involved in the productive process, producing a very precious commodity; ourselves. Students' working hours resemble those of the "free" employable or better still those of the one who is totally subsumed under the labour exploitative relation; of them who have been working for their whole life. In medical school (most of us waste our everyday lives here), which vomits a so-called upper crust of workers into the market, school-work is increasingly intensified. The modern version of the future doctor is constructed of many hours of practical training in teaching hospitals, days of duty, compulsory attendance at several courses and lectures and full-time studying, which has nothing to do with the renaissance dream of homo universalis. The ideological veil of this intensified unpaid labour consists of words like "education", "professionalism" and "conscience". A whole generation of young people has been nursed with the values of the American - Dream - Made - in - Greece, that of becoming a respectable lawyer or doctor; and when one is committed to become an expert at their object (see exhaustive work without any "free time"), complete their university qualifications with honors (see individualism and fierce competition), lick his doctors-educators' ass, they will be rewarded with the respective social acknowledgement and a big wage.

We'll probably have to remind that the era during which many doctors had been a secure middle class faction has ended for some years now. Medical students come in their majority from working class families, which cannot afford even a small private consulting room. Most of them are going to be employed in one of the various health services' enterprises (private or state funded) or otherwise be a part of the so-called industrial reserve army. A huge medical proletariat has emerged in Greece during the last 10 years;

printed on our brains and bodies that it is preserved during our struggles, too. Take as an example the admiration for those with “leading abilities” or with the ability to give a rousing speech, the applause for vain unionists’ words, the millions of photos from massive general assemblies, the obsessional idea that our demonstrations should head towards governmental buildings—symbols of decision making, the spectacular collision with the cops...this is the spectacle laying wait. The spectacle is the nightmare of imprisoned modern society which ultimately expresses nothing more than its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of sleep. What the movement must do is to crush the images through our creative actions.

Fourth myth: Coordination.

National coordination reflects the sterility of politics and essentially our weakness. Unionists, dozens of leftist groups offer platforms written in advance by their leadership. National coordination is a certain political power’s attempt to dominate the movement. We know that coordinating the actions of the various parts of the movement in a broader framework is necessary; so is the development of ideas within the movement. However, not only doesn’t the national coordination (in the way it has developed so far) promote this, but it is also hostile to such a necessity. The only existing debate is about whether coordination is necessary or not, about the “when” and the “where”, but there is no discussion about what exactly we are going to coordinate. Discussion about the content of our actions is almost totally absent from the most occupation committees. In cases where only one political power dominates, content is self-evident; it is its political platform. In the rest of the committees discussion is always postponed in order for a so-called unity over the “minimums” not to be disrupted.

It is quite clear that under such conditions national coordination means the domination of the political platform of the organisation or the organisations that will dominate (primarily in terms of numbers) in the amphitheater’s conflict. They want us to be spectators. Instead, since we don’t seek for the “minimums” but for the maximum (“We don’t want just a loaf of bread, but the whole fucking bakery”, according to an old slogan), we must destroy their aspirations and coordinate our actions in an autonomous way.

Fifth myth: You are wrong; I don’t work...but when I grow up I’ll become a doctor!

Very few people have yet to understand that university is tied up with the

dent revolt, which had already succeeded in holding a section of Paris behind its barricades an entire night before being recaptured with great difficulty by the police. The Sorbonne was given over to the students in the hope that they would peacefully discuss their university problems. But the occupiers immediately decided to open it to the public to freely discuss the general problems of the society. This was thus a prefiguration of a council, a council in which even the students broke out of their miserable studenthood and ceased being students.

To be sure, the occupation was never complete: a chapel and a few remaining administrative offices were tolerated. The democracy was never total: future technocrats of the UNEF [National Student Union] claimed to be making themselves useful and other political bureaucrats also tried their manipulations. Workers’ participation remained very limited and the presence of nonstudents soon began to be questioned. Many students, professors, journalists and imbeciles of other professions came as spectators.

In spite of all these deficiencies, which are not surprising considering the disparity between the scope of the project and the narrowness of the student milieu, the exemplary nature of the best aspects of this situation immediately took on an explosive significance. Workers were inspired by the free discussion and the striving for a radical critique, by seeing direct democracy in action. Even limited to a Sorbonne liberated from the state, this was a revolutionary program developing its own forms. The day after the occupation of the Sorbonne the Sud-Aviation workers of Nantes occupied their factory. On the third day, Thursday the 16th, the Renault factories at Cléon and Flins were occupied and the movement began at the NMPP and at Boulogne-Billancourt, starting at Shop 70. Three days later 100 factories have been occupied and the wave of strikes, accepted but never initiated by the union bureaucracies, is paralyzing the railroads and developing into a general strike.

The only power in the Sorbonne was the general assembly of its occupiers. At its first session, on May 14, amidst a certain confusion, it had elected an Occupation Committee of 15 members revocable by it each day. Only one of the delegates, a member of the Nanterre-Paris Enragés group, had set forth a program: defense of direct democracy in the Sorbonne and absolute power of workers councils as ultimate goal. The next day’s general assembly reelected its entire Occupation Committee, which had as yet been unable to accomplish anything. In fact, the various specialized groupings that had set themselves up in the Sorbonne all followed the directives of a hidden “Co

ordination Committee” composed of self-appointed organizers, responsible to no one, doing everything in their power to prevent any “irresponsible” extremist actions. An hour after the reelection of the Occupation Committee one of these “coordinators” privately tried to declare it dissolved. A direct appeal to the people in the courtyard of the Sorbonne aroused a movement of protests that forced the manipulator to retract himself. By the next day, Thursday the 16th, thirteen members of the Occupation Committee had disappeared, leaving two comrades, including the Enragés member, vested with the only delegation of power authorized by the general assembly -- and this at a time when the urgency of the situation demanded immediate decisions: democracy was constantly being flouted in the Sorbonne while factory occupations were spreading all over the country. At 3:00 p.m. the Occupation Committee, rallying to itself as many Sorbonne occupiers as it could who were determined to maintain democracy there, launched an appeal for “the occupation of all the factories in France and the formation of workers councils.” To disseminate this appeal the Occupation Committee had at the same time to restore the democratic functioning of the Sorbonne. It had to take over or recreate from scratch all the services that were supposed to be under its authority: the loudspeaker system, printing facilities, interfaculty liaison, security. It ignored the squawking complaints of the spokesmen of various political groups (JCR [a Trotskyist group], Maoists, etc.), reminding them that it was responsible only to the general assembly. It intended to report to the assembly that very evening, but the Sorbonne occupiers’ unanimous decision to march on Renault-Billancourt (whose occupation we had learned of in the meantime) postponed the meeting until 2:00 p.m. the next day.

During the night, while thousands of comrades were at Billancourt, some unidentified persons improvised a general assembly, which broke up when the Occupation Committee, having learned of its existence, sent back two delegates to call attention to its illegitimacy.

Friday the 17th at 2:00 p.m. the regular assembly saw its rostrum occupied for a long time by self-appointed marshals belonging to the FER [another Trotskyist group]; and then had to interrupt the session for the second march on Billancourt at 5:00.

That evening at 9:00 the Occupation Committee was finally able to present a report of its activities. It was, however, completely unable to get its actions discussed and voted on, in particular its appeal for the occupation of the factories, which the assembly did not take the responsibility of either disavowing or approving. Faced with such indifference, the Occupation Com-

again, some postmen put forward the idea of delivering the mail for free. If only one post office had done it -for example by stamping all the letters without charge- it would have made an impact from which the whole movement would have benefited and the shock waves of which would have spread throughout society: the action of a minority would have had infinitely more weight, for themselves as well as for the others, than a hundred thousand votes in the assemblies.

Third myth: Images and actions.

This movement is haunted by the idea of drawing the media’s attention to its actions and “fair demands”. We find this idea absurd and even hostile. The only role the media can play is that of incorporating the movement’s language into the dominant one, into capital’s language. The only attitude we should have towards the media is that of totally negating the domination of images. As long as the movement remains within the limits of managing capital’s problems it will be reconciled with the language of the media (or at least of those [media] in opposition to present government’s strategy). Our word may escape the mediation of images and journalists’ lies only by the development of its own quality and its reflection into the respective decided actions. Practices of revolt have already emerged; we have blocked the productive process of teaching and research in the campuses. We have to expand such practices into the terrain of circulation of commodities-things and human commodities by blocking roads and railway stations. We have much to learn from the French experience in relation to this. After all, don’t we want to block the reproduction of capital’s social relations? Don’t we want to abolish anything that alienates us from our own life? Towards this direction, the movement has to find its own means of circulating its word; it must develop its own voice. The strength of a movement is in its effective power, not in what is being said about it, and the malicious gossip about it.

The dictatorship of images isn’t restricted only to the relation between the movement and the media. It also involves the relations developed among individuals into that same movement. Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle; separation between those involved in the movement and those watching it (fragmented) on TV; between those just voting for actions and those taking part in them; between those just taking part in and those organizing actions and so on...these separations create spectators at different levels. This world which is founded upon our separation from the products of our activity and our creative ability reproduces us as spectators of our life. We are used to watch our life rather than make it. This fact is so firmly im-

the students' general assemblies. We are all glad that the majority supports the occupation and the struggle. But what would happen if DAP [the governmental students' organisation] (or any "DAP") mobilised more people in some schools (or even in all of them) becoming the majority? Should we accept our defeat by adhering to democratic legitimacy? Every democratic procedure ends up in turning against our revolt. The State and all parties are quite familiar with breaking the limits of the democratic legitimacy whenever it doesn't suit their aims. The proof lies equally in the history of fascist regimes and our direct experience of our struggle right now. We would be even happier if 500 people determined to keep up fighting, although a minority in a general assembly, destroyed majority's dictatorship.

Second myth: Occupation is just a means to an end.

Even though most universities in the country are occupied, there are still many different understandings of the significance of our occupying our workplaces. Occupation is an act that blocks the productive process, whether cars are produced, higher education or human-commodities, namely us. From this point of view, occupation can be considered as a means of pressure, since it freezes the profit-producing process (and no boss, no government can accept such a freeze). But, all the more so, occupation is an act of re-appropriating the space and time dominated by capital. Blocking university's function means that first of all we stop working, studying, going round hospitals and compulsory courses. At last we have some time... some time to live (something that we cannot usually do). At last we feel that the university campus belongs to us and we give up wasting our everyday activity in an alien place. At last we can truly meet with other people, laugh, laze, enjoy ourselves. We know that in the present situation these moments of negation are probably temporary. In a couple of weeks the occupation will end. Nevertheless, we have to embrace with serenity the fact that there will be no return to normal, and then inhabit this irreversibility.

To prevent this bill from being voted or implemented is important since the latter would make our lives worse. It's also important to create those organizational forms that would question the democratic myth and avoid to get fixed as such, since every fixed organisational form is alien to us. No particular form will ever guarantee the nature of the movement. But, what primarily concerns us is to create situations able to make the possibility of returning to the former state of affairs difficult. It is a question of starting to modify, however slightly, the conditions of existence of those touched by the movement - both within it and outside it. About 20 years ago, in France

mittee had no choice but to resign. The assembly proved equally incapable of protesting against a new invasion of the rostrum by the FER troops, whose putsch seemed to be aimed at countering the provisional alliance of JCR and UNEF bureaucrats. The partisans of direct democracy realized, and immediately declared, that they had no further interest in the Sorbonne.

At the very moment that the example of the occupation is beginning to be taken up in the factories it is collapsing at the Sorbonne. This development is more serious since the workers have against them a bureaucracy infinitely more powerful and entrenched than that of the student or leftist amateurs. To add to the confusion, the leftist bureaucrats, echoing the CGT [the Communist Party-dominated labor union] in the hope of being accorded a little marginal role alongside it, abstractly separate the workers from the students. ("The workers don't need any lessons from the students.") But the students have in fact already given an excellent lesson to the workers precisely by occupying the Sorbonne and briefly initiating a really democratic debate. The bureaucrats all tell us demagogically that the working class is grown up, in order to hide the fact that it is enchained -- first of all by them (now or in their future hopes, depending on which group they're in). They counterpose their lying seriousness to the "festivity" in the Sorbonne; but it was precisely that festiveness that bore within itself the only thing that is serious: the radical critique of prevailing conditions.

The student struggle has now been left behind. Even more left behind are all the second-string bureaucratic leaders who think it's a good idea to feign respect for the Stalinists at the very moment when the CGT and the so-called "Communist" Party are terrified. The outcome of the present crisis is in the hands of the workers themselves, if only they succeed in accomplishing in their factory occupations the goals toward which the university occupation was only able to hint at.

The comrades who supported the first Sorbonne Occupation Committee -- the Enragés-Situationist International Committee, a number of workers, and a few students -- have formed a Council for Maintaining the Occupations. The occupations can obviously be maintained only by quantitatively and qualitatively extending them, without sparing any existing regime.

COUNCIL FOR MAINTAINING THE OCCUPATIONS

Paris, 19 May 1968

5. For the Power of the Workers Councils

In the space of ten days workers have occupied hundreds of factories, a spontaneous general strike has brought the country to a standstill, and de facto committees have taken over many state-owned buildings. This situation -- which cannot last but must either extend itself or disappear (through repression or defeatist negotiations) -- is sweeping aside all the old ideas and confirming all the radical hypotheses on the return of the revolutionary proletarian movement. The fact that the whole movement was actually triggered five months ago by a half dozen revolutionaries of the “Enragés” group reveals even better how much the objective conditions were already present. The French example is already having repercussions in other countries, reviving the internationalism that is inseparable from the revolutions of our century.

The fundamental struggle is now between the mass of workers -- who do not have direct means of expressing themselves -- and the leftist political and labor-union bureaucracies that (even if merely on the basis of the 14% of the active population that is unionized) control the factory gates and the right to negotiate in the name of the occupiers. These bureaucracies are not workers’ organizations that have degenerated and betrayed the workers; they are a mechanism for integrating the workers into capitalist society. In the present crisis they are the main protection of this shaken capitalism.

The de Gaulle regime may negotiate -- essentially (even if only indirectly) with the PCF-CGT [French Communist Party and the labor union it dominates] -- for the demobilization of the workers in exchange for some economic benefits; after which the radical currents would be repressed. Or the “Left” may come to power and pursue the same policies, though from a weaker position. Or an armed repression may be attempted. Or, finally, the workers may take the upper hand by speaking for themselves and becoming conscious of goals as radical as the forms of struggle they have already put into practice. Such a process would lead to the formation of workers councils making decisions democratically at the rank-and-file level, federating with each other by means of delegates revocable at any moment, and becoming the sole deliberative and executive power over the entire country.

How could the continuation of the present situation lead to such a prospect? Within a few days, perhaps, the necessity of starting certain sectors of the economy back up again under workers’ control could lay the bases for this new power, a power which everything is already pushing to burst through the constraints of the unions and parties. The railroads and printshops would



Anti-CPE protests, France 2006

working more and more intensively and always without pay. We are tired of all this crap like “student life”, “knowledge” and “education”. We are outraged with the fact that we get to think how capital could better manage our exploitation. We are distressed by political games, political tactics and every thought concerning political cost. Only those who go into politics could have a political cost. The only politics we are concerned with is the abolition of politics. So we need to get over with some myths haunting the minds of lots of people with whom we struggle together, side by side.

First myth: Majority is always right.

The idea that within a movement one must count hands, or even that one could, makes no sense. To yield to this idea is to place oneself at the mercy of the democratist illusion according to which the collective will is the simple addition of sovereign individual wills, whereas in reality it is always the result of a complex play of reciprocal influences. The democratic myth wishes to convince us that only individuals exist, each one with its own responsibilities [2], its own will and its own thoughts. Our experience, however, proves that human relationships, communities and the joy of human contact exist; what we see is that all these are destroyed day by day. Their democracy wants us to be alone, neurotic isolated individuals. Their contradiction is that we cannot produce profit for them by being isolated, so the productive cooperation between us must always be ensured. In this contradiction is where our power lies.

When deliberative proceedings are constituted (an assembly, a coordination or a parliament) the principal question is not the procedures by which the will of all the participants can best express itself, but the relation between the process of debate and the action, a question which cannot be dissociated from the nature of the action itself. We don't care about procedures in which everybody's opinion can be expressed. We don't want to debate with everybody. The opinion of those who try in a certain time to change the conditions of their lives is what concerns us. If a situation is sufficiently rich in possibilities, one can well conceive of a minority undertaking its own action alongside the majority, and that the result of their actions then leads a good part of the majority to join the minority, or else shows the minority that it was mistaken. The domination of the democratic illusion would lead the minority to inertia due to respect towards the majority and the movement as a whole would lose the opportunity for a qualitative leap forward.

What we say here can be easily understood if we think of the procedure of

have to be put back into operation for the needs of the workers' struggle. New de facto authorities would have to requisition and distribute food. If money became devalued or unavailable it might have to be replaced by vouchers backed by those new authorities. It is through such a practical process that the consciousness of the deepest aspirations of the proletariat can impose itself -- the class consciousness that lays hold on history and brings about the workers' power over all aspects of their own lives.

COUNCIL FOR MAINTAINING THE OCCUPATIONS

Paris, 22 May 1968

Address to All Workers

Comrades,

What we have already done in France is haunting Europe and will soon threaten all the ruling classes of the world, from the bureaucrats of Moscow and Peking to the millionaires of Washington and Tokyo. Just as we have made Paris dance, the international proletariat will once again take up its assault on the capitals of all the states and all the citadels of alienation. The occupation of factories and public buildings throughout the country has not only brought a halt to the functioning of the economy, it has brought about a general questioning of the society. A deep-seated movement is leading almost every sector of the population to seek a real transformation of life. This is the beginning of a revolutionary movement, a movement which lacks nothing but the consciousness of what it has already done in order to triumph.

What forces will try to save capitalism? The regime will fall unless it threatens to resort to arms (accompanied by the promise of new elections, which could only take place after the capitulation of the movement) or even resorts to immediate armed repression. If the Left comes to power, it too will try to defend the old world through concessions and through force. The best defender of such a “popular government” would be the so-called “Communist” Party, the party of Stalinist bureaucrats, which has fought the movement from the very beginning and which began to envisage the fall of the de Gaulle regime only when it realized it was no longer capable of being that regime's main guardian. Such a transitional government would really be “Kerenskyist” only if the Stalinists were beaten. All this will ultimately depend on the workers' consciousness and capacities for autonomous organization. The workers who have already rejected the ridiculous agreement that the union

leaders were so pleased with need only discover that they cannot “win” much more within the framework of the existing economy, but that they can take everything by transforming all the bases of the economy on their own behalf. The bosses can hardly pay more; but they can disappear.

The present movement did not become “politicized” by going beyond the miserable union demands regarding wages and pensions, demands which were falsely presented as “social questions.” It is beyond politics: it is posing the social question in its simple truth. The revolution that has been in the making for over a century is returning. It can express itself only in its own forms. It’s too late for a bureaucratic-revolutionary patching up. When a recently de-Stalinized bureaucrat like André Barjonet calls for the formation of a common organization that would bring together “all the authentic forces of revolution . . . whether they march under the banner of Trotsky or Mao, of anarchy or situationism,” we need only recall that those who today follow Trotsky or Mao, to say nothing of the pitiful “Anarchist Federation,” have nothing to do with the present revolution. The bureaucrats may now change their minds about what they call “authentically revolutionary”; authentic revolution will not change its condemnation of bureaucracy.

At the present moment, with the power they hold and with the parties and unions being what they are, the workers have no other choice but to organize themselves in unitary rank-and-file committees directly taking over the economy and all aspects of the reconstruction of social life, asserting their autonomy vis-a-vis any sort of political or unionist leadership, ensuring their self-defense and federating with each other regionally and nationally. In so doing they will become the sole real power in the country, the power of the workers councils. The only alternative is to return to their passivity and go back to watching television. The proletariat is “either revolutionary or nothing.”

What are the essential features of council power?

* Dissolution of all external power * Direct and total democracy * Practical unification of decision and execution * Delegates who can be revoked at any moment by those who have mandated them

* Abolition of hierarchy and independent specializations * Conscious management and transformation of all the conditions of liberated life * Permanent creative mass participation * Internationalist extension and coordination

democratic practice, but a political accomplished fact, an immediate expropriation, a relationship of power. No one has ever voted the establishment of capitalism. [...] A strange idea haunts this movement, the idea of occupying university buildings only during work hours. This is an occupation that does not liberate space. An occupation where fire fighters, administrators and pretexts of authority and safety continue to make us childish, and where the university will remain simply a university. It’s true that once we’ve taken over this space, we would need to populate it, populate it with things other than the desire to return to normal. We have to embrace with serenity the fact that there will be no return to normal, and then inhabit this irreversibility.[...] No one has the right to tell us that what we are doing is “illegitimate”. We don’t have to see ourselves as spectators of the struggle, even less should we see ourselves from the point of view of the enemy. Legitimacy belongs to those who believe in their actions, to those who know what they are doing and why they are doing it. This idea of legitimacy is obviously opposed to that of the State, majority and representation. It does not submit to the same rationales, it imposes its own rationales. If the politicizing consists in a struggle of different legitimacies, of different ideas of happiness, our task from now on is to give means to this struggle with no other limit but what appears to us to be just and joyful.

From “An Update by the Sorbonne Occupation Committee in Exile”, distributed during the March unrest in France.

We begin this small note by tracking a moment of the social explosion in France a few months ago. Indeed, we are referring to France but mainly not to what actually happened there but to what didn’t happen; to the failings and weaknesses of that movement; to the revolutionary content that didn’t exist and to the practices that didn’t take place; to anything we need to overcome as that struggle’s lessons become a part of our own memory, of our own struggle here. The movement in France has ended. What it has left is not only the partial withdrawal of the “CPE”, but also a legacy in the minds of those been there, in the streets of the “City of Light” and the rest of France; moments of human poetry and collective joy.

The whole campus in our city is now occupied and under our control. We demonstrate in the streets to overthrow capital’s attack against our lives, an attack represented by the new bill. We do not accept the solution capital offers us. This doesn’t mean that we are satisfied with what now exists. By occupying the university, by fighting, we create a time-barricade, which we desire to become a total attack against the existing world. We are tired of

the limitlessly limited choices offered by the spectacle, of the promise of a future with nothing more than even more work, even more insecurity, even more fear. The strong and decided opposition to the new bill represents this young proletariat's reply to the neo-liberal fixations: don't blame us for the fact that social needs are not covered; we won't pay for this; we won't try any harder. However, this negation is segmental and (so far) not united towards a radical critique of the existing world. What emerges so far as the dominant tendency of this movement, a tendency which is continually reinforced by the Left, is the defense against the legislative reform in Higher Education, which means the affirmation of an earlier form of class settlement. This is reflected in slogans such as "Public and Free Education", "We want jobs, not unemployment" ... [1]. Eventually, this movement ended at late June, when the government announced that the introduction of the new law will be postponed till autumn; in regard to this, we shouldn't ignore both the practices of the (reformist or radical) social-democratic leftist organisations and the imminent summer break.

We know that this introduction is too short to describe and criticize a whole social struggle. This is not the place to take on such a work. We are working on such a project in Greek right now. For now, we publish in English our contribution Occupation, not democracy!. This leaflet was written by some of us together with other comrades during the early days of the movement. It was distributed during the second week of the occupations and in the 10000 people demonstration in Thessaloniki. Its content was determined by what we saw then as the major weaknesses of the movement, i.e. the adherence to democratic procedures and generally to a democratist ideology along with the absence of any critique of schoolwork and of the media's mediating role. Another leaflet under the title Let the occupations become time-barricades was distributed in Athens and Thessaloniki during the third and fourth week of the movement, criticizing the various leftist groups and introducing the "social wage" demand. We hope that this will be also available to English readers in the future.

Blaumachen
Thessaloniki, summer 2006

About some widely spread myths; to be used by the fighting students (and not only them) of June

The idea of democratically debating every day those who are against the strike on the renewal of the strike is absurd. The strike has never been a

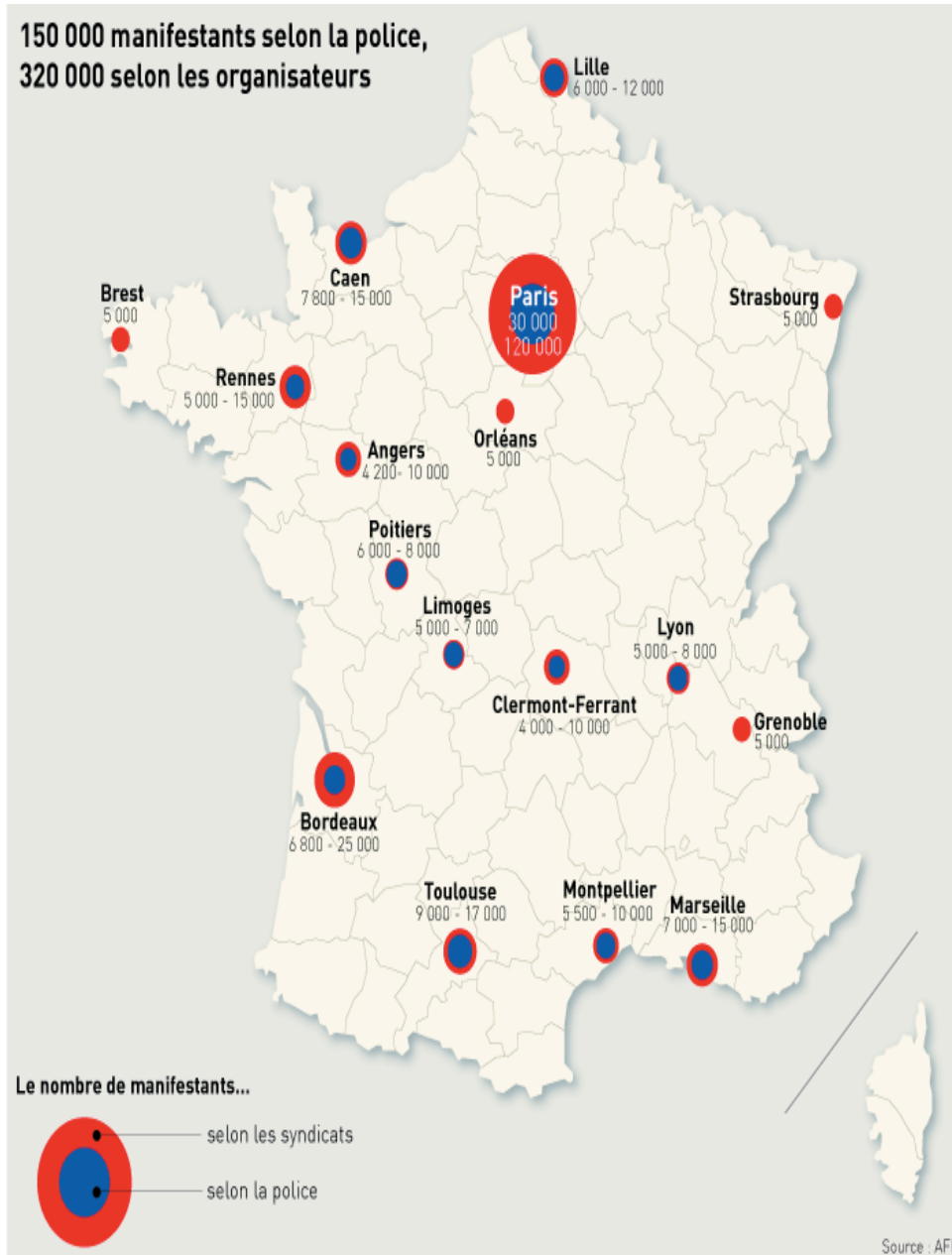
The present requirements are nothing less than this. Self-management is nothing less. Beware of all the modernist coopters -- including even priests -- who are beginning to talk of self-management or even of workers councils without acknowledging this minimum, because they want to save their bureaucratic functions, the privileges of their intellectual specializations or their future careers as petty bosses!

In reality, what is necessary now has been necessary since the beginning of the proletarian revolutionary project. It's always been a question of working-class autonomy. The struggle has always been for the abolition of wage labor, of commodity production, and of the state. The goal has always been to accede to conscious history, to suppress all separations and "everything that exists independently of individuals." Proletarian revolution has spontaneously sketched out its appropriate forms in the councils -- in St. Petersburg in 1905, in Turin in 1920, in Catalonia in 1936, in Budapest in 1956. The preservation of the old society, or the formation of new exploiting classes, has each time been over the dead body of the councils. The working class now knows its enemies and its own appropriate methods of action. "Revolutionary organization has had to learn that it can no longer fight alienation with alienated forms" (The Society of the Spectacle). Workers councils are clearly the only solution, since all the other forms of revolutionary struggle have led to the opposite of what was aimed at.

ENRAGES-SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE
COUNCIL FOR MAINTAINING THE OCCUPATIONS

30 May 1968

France, 2006



Occupation, not democracy!

Luther Blissett
Summer 2006

Introduction

To begin with we should write some introductory lines about the students' movement that spread throughout Greece during last May and June. We believe this is necessary since very few information on it is available in English. We write considering ourselves a part of that movement, given that at least half of Blaumachen's members are students themselves.

Higher Education in Greece undergoes restructuring in accordance to "Bologna Declaration" (1999) and as a part of the wider neo-liberal restructuring of the indigenous capital relations. The aim is, as elsewhere in Europe, producing a rather flexible labour force, susceptible to life-long learning and reskilling. This policy has created an increasingly proletarianized young population, doomed for its most parts to flexible working conditions and/or unemployment. The present Higher Education restructuring has met the first waves of resistance in the 2001 students' struggle. However, that struggle has ended, schoolwork has been increasingly intensified since then and at the same time some legislative reforms have already taken place (although they have not been implemented yet). The present (neo-conservative) government's efforts aim at revising the constitution which for now secures the public character of Higher Education and reforming the legislation concerning Higher Education in order to align university with the imperatives of evaluation, competitiveness, flexibilization and commodification. This attempt ignited the recent students' struggle.

"June's days" have been the most massive students' movement in Greece since 1986. 430 university and technical university departments have been occupied (451 in all), a great number of demonstrations (with the biggest of them in Athens and Thessaloniki with twenty and ten thousands demonstrators respectively), clashes with cops in Athens' centre and massive general assemblies have taken place. In our opinion, "we can understand nothing about this struggle if we think that the draft proposal of the new bill is the only problem for this young proletariat occupying university buildings, giving up studying, demonstrating and making its own festivals. Instead, we live a social explosion which reflects the accumulated anger, the negation of an everyday life in campuses increasingly intensified, of the poverty of

Two weeks spent in Rennes

2006

A first-hand and in-depth account of events in Rennes - one of the most militant towns - by a participant in the anti-CPE movement.

This is a report on the two weeks I spent in Rennes (during what came to be called the anti-CPE movement), from the 27th of March to the 6th of April, that is during the two weeks that preceded the withdrawal of the CPE. Because I already knew a few students from Rennes 2, and because I was a student myself last year in France, I had the opportunity to participate in actions and assemblies without feeling especially exterior to the movement, even if obviously the fact that I hadn't been involved in it from the beginning did sometimes impair my understanding of the situation.

Obviously, this report doesn't replace an analysis of the "anti-CPE" movement in general and of its implications for the current social situation in France. Indeed, it is mostly an everyday account of the actions and discussions that took place during these two weeks. But I think it might be able to shed some light on the movement, especially for people who only know about it through their own country's media. Indeed, these would typically focus on what was going on in Paris, disregarding the fact that the movement had started in provincial cities long before the Sorbonne was occupied, and that the situation in provincial cities was sometimes very different from the Paris situation. (For example, the phenomenon of "banlieue kids" attacking students and schoolchildren in demos was completely unheard of outside Paris.) It seems that in each city or town the movement took a slightly different form because it was organised locally, the general assemblies in each university having the decisive organisational power.

When I arrived in Rennes, the students had already been on strike for more than 6 weeks (indeed, Rennes 2 was the first university to go on strike, followed shortly by students from Toulouse and Nanterre.). But the movement was still at its peak, as the union confederation had called for a day of strikes and mass demonstrations for the first time.

Monday 27th March

I arrived late at night and went to visit the occupied university Rennes 2



Sorbonne occupation, Paris 2006

(there are two universities in Rennes, one for the humanities (Rennes 2) and one for science and law (Rennes 1)). In fact, only one building, called the “Hall B” was occupied, the other buildings having had their entrances blocked by tables and chairs and guarded by picket lines. There had been attempts by the anti-occupation students to cross the picket lines using force at the beginning of the strike but as they had failed it was unlikely that they would try again. Therefore, there were only one or two people for each picket at the time I arrived.

The first thing you see when you arrive in front of Hall B is a huge banner saying “lutte sociale, tous a poils” (social struggle, let’s all get naked). Inside, there are lots of people drinking, singing and shouting, and you can see they are not all students. At the same time, in the lecture rooms, the “commissions” prepare the actions for the following day. Three actions had been voted for at the general assembly of that afternoon (which had gathered around 5000 people) for the next day, Tuesday, a day which would see a common demonstration with workers and a strike in numerous sectors, especially in the public sector. The three actions were: to paint the windows of temp agencies, banks etc., to put some glue in the locks of these buildings, and to occupy the main train station. The task of the “action commission” was therefore to prepare them. There were 5 commissions meeting everyday in which everybody (student or not) could participate: “action”, “internal” (making links with the university workers : teachers, cleaning staff etc...), “external” (making links with workers outside the university as well as school kids, unemployed, etc...), “occupation” (organising life in the campus : picket lines, cleaning rotas...) and “repression” (informing everybody on our rights when arrested, going to court etc...) These commissions would make propositions to the general assemblies (though it was possible to do that without participating in any commission) and if accepted the commissions would then work on making these propositions happen.

Tuesday 28 March

(First day of strike called by the workers unions)

After having prepared the paint and the glue we went to the demonstration at 11. It is massive. Being used to smaller demonstrations, people preparing the actions had thought it would be possible to find each other without giving each other a proper gathering point. We spent hours trying to find each other, then gave up and just did a few things in small groups. When we would “repaint” a building, we would protect the guy doing it by encircling him. At one point, two big guys from the “service d’ordre” or “SO” (workers union

various parts of the educational restructuring are concerned. If our struggle keeps barricading itself in the university, if students keep doing the ritual weekly demo, if the struggle isn’t circulated in other parts of the proletariat, we will have to confront a worse law than this in the future.

In order to bring close the occupied university with the rest of the city we need to make the whole city live like an occupied university. Let’s block the streets, where human and non-human commodities circulate. Let’s block the railway stations. Let’s party outside the university, let’s meet all these people we did not have time to meet before. Let’s celebrate wildly the re-appropriation of our time.

footnotes:

- 1) Workers’ General Confederation in Greece
- 2) Greek Communist Party.
- 3) Due to a law enforced in 1998 one has to take exams after the university in order to be hired as a teacher. If they fail or even they succeed but there isn’t any place offered, they remain unemployed.

We are creative subjects and our wealth is our community. We need to own the social wealth that we have produced so far and everything we will produce in the future. We need to share the results of our creativity. This is the meaning of freedom for us: Social freedom.

So, we deny evaluation and intensification of our student (or not) work. To start with, we could demand the satisfaction of our needs. We should not care if and when we are going to find a job. It should not be our problem. We demand wage for all of us.

We demand social wage for students, housewives, unemployed. Let's throw the crisis back to capital.

Is it the case that people cannot be treated properly in the (factory like) hospitals because of lack of nursing personnel? And at the same time capital denies to hire doctors and nurses? It's not our problem! We demand social wage for every unemployed doctor and nurse.

Is it the case that pupils get stacked in a room and the state denies to hire teachers? We don't care! We demand social wage for every unemployed teacher and we do not take part in the exams anymore [3].

Are the factories shut down because of the "relocation of production"? That's better for the workers to breathe clean air! We demand social wage for every unemployed worker!

Do you threaten us that there are not enough jobs and we cannot "settle ourselves" in the waged slavery? Better for us! We want to live; we don't want to work for you. We demand wage AGAINST work and unemployment!

The way we are going to organize something arises from what is to be organized. We can make them run!

They have been trying to enforce this law since 1982 slightly different each time regarding the objective conditions and their estimation of our rejecting power. We have stopped them in the past and probably we are going to stop them now! Is this enough to stop the continuous worsening of our life? Let's look around: The answer is NO. People have to work more and more, everybody seems to be even more isolated. As long as we keep on defending the past, capital will keep on attacking our future. If we just say no to this law, they will retry to enforce it at a more suitable moment (for them). They will probably try to enforce it step by step; as they have already done as far as

stewards, whose role is to stop you from marching in front of the first banner or at the sides of the demonstration or prevent any illegal activity) wanted to stop us, saying it was illegal, to which we could answer that it was "democratic" as it had been accepted in the general assembly of Rennes 2. Vive la democratie !! One persisted and tried to grab the bucket of paint but got the bucket poured on his head and then, humiliated, went away, saying nothing more! As you can see it wasn't the same level of conflict than in Paris. As we had voted against having a "service d'ordre" in one of the assemblies, we could disregard the orders of the SO and get our banners ("General strike, let's block everything" and "Revolution" - both accepted in the general assembly) at the very front of the demonstration for a while.

When we arrived at the station, it had already been stormed by demonstrators. Nobody had had to shout to divert the demonstration, it had happened naturally as if it had been obvious to everyone that we had to do that (the rain had helped a bit, too). We were thousands and there were no cops. Hundreds of students gathered on the rails and all the trains were blocked. It was joyful and people were singing. I heard some shop windows in the station and the interior of a TGV were damaged, but I didn't see it. We stayed around 2 hours and at around 3pm a spontaneous demonstration left the station, starting with around 500 people but then growing to around 1000. It went in the direction of the UMP local office, always heavily guarded by the police, and where all the riots always start. When a police line stopped us, people at the front row began throwing empty bottles at them.

To simplify, I could say that they were a mixture of "banlieue kids" and "anarchists", but both of the terms would be quite inadequate. There isn't such a clear geographical divide between city and banlieue in Rennes and there aren't much black or arabic people either. Most of those I could call "anarchists" are students, participating in all the other aspects of the movement, and most of the young people I could call "banlieue kids" are probably secondary-school students. Still, you can immediately see a difference in the way they dress, in the way they talk, the tactics they use to attack the police, and the fact that "banlieue kids" usually stay unmasked.

After a few minutes of throwing bottles at the police, some pacifists went in front of the police line to protect them. They were pelted with bottles and stones and had nothing to protect themselves. There were tensions between the demonstrators on what to do, some pacifists trying to stop the people throwing stones, some students defending them. Anyway, the divide was not a divide between students and banlieue kids at all, even if my student

friends were feeling a bit awkward as they knew that if a pacifist student was hurt (which seemed quite plausible) the position of the general assembly on violence was likely to change. The situation was diffused by the fact that some began to smash shop windows, a fact that was greeted with cheers by violent students and “banlieue kids” alike. A few minutes later, a “pacifist” threw a stone at a guy who was smashing a shop window. This fact rapidly became known by everybody, and from that moment till the moment I left Rennes “militant” pacifists disappeared from demonstrations as soon as clashes with the police began.

15 minutes later, the police charged, and began to arrest people, directing their rubber bullet guns at us and starting to encircle us. As we heard people speak of dispersion, we decided to leave the demonstration and go to a café. We thought that was the end of the riot, but when we came out of the café, one hour later, we saw a big cloud of tear gas in the sky and joined the demonstration again. It was one of the best things with the riots in Rennes. You think it’s finished as groups get isolated after a dispersion but in fact those groups keep wandering in the town centre, bump into another group, phone their friends, and half an hour later the riot starts again.

The cat and mouse game with the police lasted till around 7p.m., at which time we went back to the university to prepare the actions for the following day, especially the blocking of the “rocade”, Rennes’ ring road.

Wednesday 29th March

We got up at 5h30 and went to one of the three meeting points, situated at three different points of the rocade. At the beginning we were only 100 so we only blocked one of the road leading to the rocade. We went to gather bins, trolleys and bits of wood to build a barricade. Some of which we burned to make sure motorists would not try to destroy it. More students were arriving all the time until we were around 300, at which point we went to invade the rocade. At first I thought it would be very difficult, looking at this motorway where lorries and cars were driving at 120 km/h. But all went well as we used bins and trolleys to protect us from crazy motorists. When our barricade was ready, some car drivers came to speak with us. People were sympathetic on the whole and most of them would at least come out of their cars and speak to each other. Everybody knew what it was about and nobody was indifferent to the subject. It felt a bit surreal to be standing in the middle of this motorway at 8 o’clock with this huge sky above us, and we could even hear the birds sing. Two workers from the nearby factory climbed a wall to speak to us and congratulate us. Most of the people I spoke to agreed that, because

more and that the only solution is the war against each other. We blame ourselves for unemployment and work insecurity. So, we fall to believing that if we work harder and more, for less money facing each other as enemies, then we will survive with dignity. Reality is reversed. Exploitation and alienation are presented as a normal situation and capital’s responsibility for the misery of our lives is transferred to us. Even though the law is not established yet, more and more exams and projects and post-graduate studies (most of them with tuitions) take place in students’ everyday life. More and more of our time is stolen for less money, we are compelled to work without salary and they feed us with promises; they threaten us everyday: if we do not have high degrees or previous employment, we do not deserve to work, therefore to live. Our life is crushed between work (in order to pay our rent) and exams, between nights and days in front of a PC and alcohol (that we drink not for pleasure but for waste), between army service and “ordinary” paid work and loneliness. Beginning from this shit, how far can we go? Can we storm heaven?

How are we going to respond?

We can stop giving answers to their questions and dilemmas. That’s a start. Let’s stop feeling guilty for every malfunction of capital. It’s not our job to cope with the problems of their economy, state’s debts or the bankruptcy of the insurance funds (as [1] does). We won’t help them earn more. We won’t propose how many doctors must work at hospitals, how many teachers at schools, how many engineers at offices and worksites or how many workers at industries. We won’t help them exploit us more efficiently. We won’t make any suggestions about how we are going to become more profitable cogwheels of their system (like the representatives of the almost dead petty-bourgeois capital: KKE [2]). Social movements must not make any suggestions of educational and labour policy to the state, neither to think how they could contribute to the ascendancy of the crises that bosses face. Instead, social movements must use these crises in order to accentuate class struggle as much as possible; they must break the established social relations and fixed roles.

Let us be the ones who demand. Our needs have nothing to do with the development of their economy. We want time for ourselves. We want our life. We need the joy of love, the community with our friends; this is what makes us powerful. We are not the ego bastards of the advertisements. We do not want to compete with anybody. We do not want to be separated individuals. We are the relations we now own or build in the everyday struggle for life.

never turn up at the occupied buildings. Passiveness and the trust they show to “their representatives” are so strong that most students think the only thing they can do is to let the specialists of politics handle the struggle. Obviously, the leftist organizations have a hand in it, trying to block every substantial debate in most open occupy committees. Their left fairy tale tells us that most students “have not understood”, “have not been politicized” or “don’t know enough about the law”. We cannot even smile with their pathetic performance.

The law as a solution of the capitalist state: an individualistic one.

The political zombies present the law as an attack to our rights (to be educated and work). Indeed, the new law is a part of the overall attack of capital to our class taking place last few years. It is an offensive move that tends to steal more of our time with only a promise for individual success against the others. It is a solution, indeed, an individualistic one. A solution that divides us in small and flexible factions and tries to create the objective conditions of our future division, too, since it will be more difficult for us to realize our common interests if this law is enforced. It is a solution that makes us (the working students) pay the cost of the (re)production of our labour power. The new institutions capital and state propose, such as the institute of lifetime education, constitute solutions addressed to every person separately. Each one of us is presented as a competitor in the market, which in the real world (and not the politically correct language of capital) means that everybody is presented as the enemy of all the others.

On the other side, the left wing of capital does nothing more than imagining the return to the past forms of class compromise. The bankruptcy of the traditional left is evident in the fact that it is unable to propose any practical solutions: social state is dead, trade unions have almost broken down, political mediation is in the agony of death. Lacking any practical proposals, traditional left sings old songs: “Public Free Education”, “Work not Unemployment”. These songs are the echoes of the past working class defeats. Indeed, they were forms of managing class struggle in the past, an alternative solution within the limits of capital relation. But the latter has evolved. It has been globally restructured. Capital seems to be unable (thus unwilling) to return to its old glorious form. There is no place for social democracy.

What had already been happening before the law was introduced?

Firstly, we are being terrified that there is no way out from this situation any



Anti-CPE protests, France 2006

the government hadn't withdrawn the law after the huge demonstration of the previous day, it was normal to try something else. I only heard one guy shout very angrily at an isolated policeman "Why aren't you doing anything. Disperse them". It is true that the police took a long time to react, almost two hours. It may be because there were 3 different points blocked on the rocade and they couldn't attack all of them at the same time (ours was attacked the last). It's more likely that they didn't want to seem too repressive in a context of general solidarity. Anyway, when the CRS arrived they just bombarded us with teargas and we ran away. We had stayed long enough for it to be a victory anyway : we had created 42 km of traffic jam ! We marched in the direction of the university, and, with the CRS following, we made a few barricades, but nobody was really prepared to fight. Once arrived at the university, we met students coming back from the other points. 100 students were still motivated to go and block the rocade again, and they still managed to block it for half an hour. Others decided to go round the campus to see if no teacher was organising clandestine lessons. They soon came back to tell us that, having caught one in the act, they lifted him out of the classroom by his arms and legs in front of the whole class. Hearing that, we went back in a bigger group, found the teacher, encircled him, and one of us warned him, whilst toying with a metal rod, that to put on other lessons might mean recklessly playing with his life! We later learnt that the teacher had lodged a complaint against the guy, so a vote in support for him was later accepted by the assembly. Anyway, we never heard of any clandestine lesson after that!

In the afternoon, there was another general assembly (for strikers only) which gathered around 500 people. It was a bit messy, with a kind of formalism which sometimes seemed inadequate (voting on every little practical point for example) but there was an amazing energy, with a tendency to vote for so many actions for the same day that it would have been impossible to do all of them, even without sleeping. When it came to voting for delegates to the national coordination, a general feeling of rejection of unions was expressed, with candidates from UNEF (the main student union) systematically whistled and the candidates saying they didn't belong to an union welcomed with applause. When the events of the previous day were discussed, people intervening to say that there was no divide between demonstrators and "cas-seurs" were those that got applauded the most, and the suggestion that we should have a banner "we are all criminals" was welcomed with applause (even if nobody actually did it afterwards). The main actions voted for the following day were : blocking the rocade in the morning, demonstrating with the schoolchildren at 11, going together to meet EDF (electricity) workers around 1p.m. and a "charivari" (code name for riot) at 9p.m.!

Let the occupations become time-barricades

Group against work (waged or unwaged)

Summer 2006

This text addresses to people who have to sell their time in order to survive or they are forced to give their time for free with the promise of a future life

All those who found themselves in the amphitheatres, assemblies, occupation committees and in the circles-where-people-are-talking in and around the universities found out that the movement has to answer to (extremely) serious dilemmas: Demo in Athens or Thessaloniki? Unified University Education or Unified 3rd degree Education? Should first talk the socialist, the "communist" or the leftist fraction of the student unions? Whose turn is to speak?

Last few weeks we (the students) have been enjoying the marvelous freedom of choice; to decide upon the dilemmas parties and political organizations are always setting. They try to make us talk about how we are going to organize our struggle (supposedly practically), since its content is supposed to be predetermined. They make sure that people who talk about the content of our actions remain unheard.

Last few weeks they have been trumpeting forth the bad law. A great part of students has very well understood that the enforcement of the law will make our everyday life worse. That's why we are here anyway. But, has its content ever brought up for discussion? Have we tried to understand the real meaning of this law? Have we tried to understand the strategy hidden behind it? Why to bother with these tiny details, there are more serious things to decide: What will be the colour of the picket? And please, show your respect to the president of the assembly!

However, a great part of the students votes against the occupations. A lot of them choose the individual solutions capital offers: either they want to graduate now (that's why they are so furious about setting their exams now in the middle of the struggle), or they are for the new law (or part of it) because they believe that a more meritocratic university will secure a better future for them.

An even greater part of the students votes for the occupations, but they

Greece, 2006



Greek university occupation, Summer 2006

Thursday 30 March

The day began with a blockade of the ring road that worked well as we had the schoolchildren with us. We made more efforts to go and speak to people in their cars, some of them opening their windows to speak to us. Those I spoke to were sympathetic, other just kept their windows closed. When I went to an other point of the rocade though (4 points were blocked) I saw a group of lorry drivers who had agreed to try to destroy the barricade. After a few minutes of hesitation, we defended the barricade by putting back the trolleys as soon as the lorry drivers would cast them away, until it became clear that the situation would have to turn into a fight between us and them. Seeing our determination, (and there was only 10 of them, however strong), they gave up and started speaking with some of us rather calmly, explaining that because they had a kind of self-employed contract they couldn't afford not to go to work. I think that they first imagined that we were student hippies, that a bit of determination would be enough to make us give up, and that they were surprised that it wasn't as simple. We left 15 minutes after as we had to go to the demonstration with the schoolchildren.

There were thousands of them. We demonstrated for a while then us students tried to direct the demonstration to the EDF factory to try to meet the workers on their lunch break and to speak to them about the necessity to go on general strike (that was the plan anyway). But the schoolchildren weren't aware of this plan, their "service d'ordre" didn't want to let people go in that direction, it took ages and when we arrived the workers had finished their break. Some students tried to go in anyway, climbing the fences, some schoolchildren though we were going in to break or steal stuff and went in with that intention! A journalist who was filming people climbing the fence (which is illegal) got attacked, people were divided about that, in short, it was a big mess!

Then we went to block the ring road (again !). It was very easy as we were thousands. The police was even accompanying us ! We marched on the ring road (which had been cleared by the police) for more than an hour, which was in fact rather boring and tiring. The demonstration ended up in front of the prefecture, which was heavily guarded by the police. Most people were tired and left.

At 9 p.m. there were only around 80 people at the meeting point for the "charivari", but as we started a "spontaneous demonstration" ("manif sauvage" or "manif a parcours intuitif") people came along and our number

grew to 200. Not enough for proper rioting, especially as in previous weeks “charivaris” had gathered more than 1000 people and once even lasted till 1 a.m. But what I enjoyed the most was the spontaneity of it, as we could expect groups of drunken students, homeless people, banlieue kids to join us at any moment when seeing us go by. And this spontaneity was what was frightening the shopkeepers of the town centre the most. They would close their doors and protect their windows at the very sight of us, then open again 5 minutes after only to see us come back again! I read in the local newspaper that restaurant owners were complaining that they had hardly any customers as it had become impossible to have a quiet evening eating out. The town centre shopkeepers also complained that they were now losing 37% of their profit everyday.

This could also be explained by the presence in the middle of the town centre, on one of the most bourgeois squares of the town, of an “alternative village” built by around 30 students who had chosen this mode of action to participate in the movement. They had brought their tents and were organising projects around the idea of “alternative ways of living”. It had become a sort of rallying point when you needed some news, to get some help if you were hurt in a demonstration, to get protection if you were chased by the police etc... At night, all the punks and junkies of the town would go there to drink (a fact that was rather unwelcome for the students that had started the project) and would make a mess all night. Obviously, business as usual was impossible in these conditions, and for the inhabitants of this bourgeois area it was a nightmare. In short, the town centre was as in a state of “low civil war”, and shopkeepers and bourgeois would look at you half angrily, half frightened as soon as you would constitute a group of more than two people.

Anyway, that night we didn’t do much. There were only a few car damaged and no clashes with the police as they were very discreet. However, we demonstrated while chanting slogans such as :
-“Tout est a nous, rien est a eux, tout ce qu’ils ont ils l’ont vole, retrait du CPE, retrait du CNE, ou alors ca va peter”

(Everything is ours, nothing is theirs, everything they’ve got they stole, withdraw the CPE and the CNE or it’s all going to blow!)

To which others would answer :

“CPE, on s’en fout, on veut pas bosser du tout”

amongst human beings.

21.

We said we’d be back. We’re back. On the briefly reoccupied Sorbonne’s outer wall, a banner flapped in the wind. And through the stormy night, one could read: “Movements are made to die. Long live the insurrection!”

22.

Friday, March 31st. Chirac gives a short, senile speech. Spontaneously, groups of people start to come together across Paris. They seek each other out, find one another, converge upon the Champs Elysées, flow back, and turn off, to avoid the police patrols. 3000 people wander wildly across 25 kilometers from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. It is a crowd made up of all ages, all tendencies, ideally disarmed and dispirited by the magnitude of their own unused powers. They pass the Concord bridge, arrive at the National Assembly before the cops do, and would have entered there if they only had had a crowbar. They pass before the Palace of Justice, climb up towards Barbès and wreck everything left on Sebastopol and Magenta boulevards -- the famous “civilized space” on Magenta Blvd.! -- all the banks, employment agencies, and franchise bars, while crying out, impetuously, “Paris, wake up! On your feet!” They wave to the prostitutes on Pigalle, and climb up towards Sacré-Coeur — one can hear shouts of “Long live the Commune!” before reading them, tagged on the ignoble edifice. There too, they neglect to go inside and burn it down. Fires of joy burn in front of the Sacré-Coeur. One last McDonald’s is looted in a flash. And on the road where Pierre Lellouche’s house is -- which will soon have completely fallen apart -- an old lady who looks about 50 is leaning on her balcony in her nightgown, shouting at the top of her lungs, “the bad days will end.” It is three o’clock in the morning. And that night, in a kind of melancholy recap, we passed by everything that we will soon have to burn down.

Paris, June 2006

* Some dimwits from the National Students’ Federation and elsewhere have taken it upon themselves to protest against our signature: Who do we represent? And moreover, were we elected in the regular way? By a sovereign assembly? Must we explain to these buffoons that an occupation committee is the logistical body of an occupation - the ones who take care of supplies, of guard towers, of shit-house upkeep, etc. - and that such a committee “in exile,” the Sorbonne being under military guard, was a kind of black humor, a contradiction in terms -- a bit like a marxist in good faith?

ture to a movement that had already gone beyond them while it was still alive. As for the other reflex, you can still see a whole bunch of activist groups squirming around, dreaming of reproducing what they saw elsewhere when they ought to be going beyond it already; they'll last another few weeks or months before they run out of whatever there is left amongst them of the spirit of the movement due to a lack of volunteers. Some just talk a lot, and the others have trudged back to work.

19.

The movement always got tripped up on two questions which, in the end, gave it its finishing blow: democracy and general assemblies. Even though all you really needed at the start of the movement was a few dozen pissed off people to block an amphitheater, a building, a college, etc., you'd have to do it in spite of huge groups of 500, 1000, 2000 people voting for an end to the blockade, and otherwise be wiped off the map by the "sovereignty" of the general assembly. Very often, it was there, face to face with all the absurdity of the democratic game, that the nature of the confrontation itself, which was hidden behind the question of whether to blockade something, would really come out. Amongst the blockaders and the anti-blockaders, people in the end would come to blows.

20.

Assemblies, in practice, bring us back to those epochs when life, and, therefore, discussion, were super-charged with community. Whether community of workers or farmers, guerrillas or peoples, guayaki or hasidic. There has always been a certain theatricality, a certain hackneyed gregariousness, a certain pan-optical quality about them, with high stakes, seizures of power, control, and hegemony operating in the assemblies. There is now no longer anything but those things. That's why they've disappeared. That's why, wherever a large enough community of struggle has not been able to come about, the General Actions have been held without any real connection to what was going on in the streets. The assembly, as inadequate for the development of free thought as it is for the organization of actions, is devoid of affection; it is an empty form, a simulacrum, good for nothing and everything. Faced with this obvious fact, certain comrades called for people to desert them and form their own smaller groups. They opposed assembly to community. That was a mistake. One does not call up community: it comes about without prior decision, in much the same way that a small group forms. If discussions became empty in the general assemblies, that's not because of the word-twisters, tribunals and bureaucrats -- it's because of what makes the existence of the word-twisters, tribunals and bureaucrats possible: the absence of all community

(we don't care about the CPE, we don't want to work at all)

Other slogans went like this :

"Villepin, prends ton temps, on s'amuse énormément"

(villepin, take your time, we're having so much fun)

_"Vive le vent, vive le vent, vive le vandalisme, des coups de pied aux CRS, et des baffes a l'UNEF, des pavés dans les vitrines et des coups de barres a mines"

(Hurrah for vandalism : kicks to the riot police, slaps to the UNEF (student union), stones to the shop windows...)

The most popular one, which was also one of the most sung during the big common demonstrations with schoolchildren, went like this :

"Pends, pend, pend ton patron, t'auras sa galette, pend, pend, pend ton patron, t'auras son pognon. Si tu pend pas le patron, t'auras pas sa galette, si tu pend pas le patron, t'auras pas son pognon."

(Hang hang hang your boss and you'll have his cash, hang hang hang your boss and you'll have his dough, if you don't hang the boss, you won't have his cash, if you don't hang the boss, you won't have his dough.)

When in contact with the police, the traditional "Police partout, justice nulle part" (Police everywhere, justice nowhere) was often replaced by the more original : "Contre la grippe aviaire, principe de precaution, tous les poulets a la maison" (Against avian flu, principle of precaution: keep all the "chickens" (slang word for "cops") confined at home)

None of these slogans existed before the movement. New slogans were invented daily, and this small fact alone showed that there was a different atmosphere to that of student movements since 1998 (at least) where the same slogans would be recycled year after year.

Friday, Saturday and Sunday

During the following 3 days, not many actions were planned as most students went back to their parents' for the weekend. On Saturday, though, there



Anti-CPE protests, France 2006

16.

Everywhere in France, in the wake of the movement, groups of people have formed, houses have been squatted, and hard-cores constituted. These are not the work of seasoned fighters, but of those for whom the struggle was not a means to an end -- the retraction of the CPE -- but rather purely a means, a more desirable way of living. They are the work of those who had finally experienced the only community really accessible to them, perhaps, in the great metropolis which has set in motion the struggle for its destruction. From one year to the next, from the student movements to the waves of nocturnal arsons, we are witnessing the implosion of what is left of this society, and, in the same movement, the build up of an ever vaster, ever denser substratum of deserters. The question is: how can desertion become conspiracy? How can the small groups become a greater force? And what kind of a force can drive the passage from a situation of crisis in a movement to an insurrectionary situation? Whoever doubts our capacity to intervene in a historically decisive fashion would do well to remember how, in the most removed of cities -- Rennes, Rouen, Caen, Grenoble, Nantes, Strasbourg — a small number of organized subversives has managed to change completely the whole local texture of the movement.

17.

The lightning fadeout of the movement is easily explained. Refusing to identify the unions, the media, the administration, and the anti-blockaders as enemies, and refusing to treat them as such, the movement let them become its constituents. It cooperated with them in the General Actions, and sometimes managed to lend some color to them, but it never fought against them, representing itself as a consensus of civil society against the administration. It was a question of democracy. And so much so that when all these fine citizens and bodies declared victory -- and the burial of the movement -- in one voice, the emptiness began to wrap us up inside it: we were no longer anything but a handful of overdrawn diehards.

18.

Upon the fadeout of the movement after the announcement of the retraction of the CPE, two characteristic reflexes reacted: the militant reflex and the activist reflex. On the one hand the movement's undertakers called for a remobilization, without really believing in it too much themselves, and tried, through some little "convergence-of-struggles collective" or "anti-repression collective" to recruit a bit of the freshly politicized meat. And it's that same reflex that rules now amongst the various groupings of depressives of the trotskyst, anarchist, or autonomist obedience who are trying to give a fu-

spectacular, enormous, and above all, without a future.” More than other movements, the student movements seem stricken by the nefarious idea of mobilization, which contains within itself a depressing flip-side -- the necessary return to normalcy. By “getting mobilized,” in other words, by neglecting to organize ourselves in the struggle on the basis of our own needs -- which are not only the need to eat and sleep, but the need to think, to love, to build, to study, and to rest, to be alone or to form blocs -- by getting mobilized, that is, by putting into parentheses all those things, putting into parentheses everything that attaches us to life, by neglecting to get a grip on ourselves collectively, we assure ourselves that there will eventually come a moment of exhaustion, when at last each of us will go back, at the end of the mobilization, to the old habits and crucial passions we had left behind, and go back to them all in the same condition, the old infectious privacy. The opposite of this is the discovery of the need to organize ourselves on the basis of our desires, wherein we will construct, going from crisis to movement, a party of insurrection.

15.

In a flowing, changing world, the party of the insurrection can only be the party of the blockade, of the physical blocking of the circulation of commodities -- but because this world in flux is itself the world of absolute separation, the party of the insurrection must also be the party of communization, the party of putting things into common possession. Sooner or later, we will need to block Rungis [a large French hotel corporation]; but we will not be able to block Rungis unless we have at the same time resolved the question of supplies on a local level, and unless we have established the necessary solidarity. If it had been only our intention to attack the CPE, the sovereign assembly could have passed for some kind of proper organization. But if we're trying to finally put this dying world out of misery, the elementary form of self-organization is the commune. The commune as a common plane of action, where the organization of the blockade and the organization of life can come together. Where we could block everything, because we would no longer be dependent on general circulation, whereas we would no longer be dependent on that general circulation because we would have organized ourselves to block everything. It could appear, in the course of this retaking of the territory, that the contemporary metropolis, entirely structured by the flow of things, is not really compatible with any kind of self-organization at all, and that it must therefore be destroyed piece by piece. The experience of the Argentine insurrectionary process of 2001, limited by the extreme food-supplies dependence of Buenos Aires, demonstrates this.

were 200 people to participate in an attempt to block the commercial centres and big shops of the city such as Virgin... This was really easy as they would close the doors and protect the windows as soon as we would go near them (only to open them back when we would go away, though). One funny action I participated in was to “demenage” a Quick restaurant. You just have to go in and organise a relay to bring all the furniture out. This way it's very quick and the responsibility is shared between everyone. The funniest bit is the look of the customers and the workers (on that occasion, one of the workers tried to hold to a table but quickly had to give up, while most of the others didn't react). Then you can have a nice time sitting on chairs and tables outside before continuing the demonstration. This new way of disturbing the functioning of a place has been widely used in France during the movement as it is a middle term between occupying a place (which can be quite boring, especially when it's an horrible place) and damaging it.

Apart from this action, we spent most of the weekend discussing the necessity to extend the movement beyond a student and school kids' movement, without relying on the workers unions as they were only prepared to call for one day of strike per week.

We had to acknowledge the fact that the workers that were demonstrating with us during these strike days were not the ones that had to suffer the most from precarity, but were those who could afford to go on strike because they were either part of the public sector or part of the big, well unionised workplaces in the private sector. Their main reason to go on strike was out of solidarity with us, and that's not a sufficient reason for a general strike. On the other hand, the workers who are the most affected by precarity are working in small, non-unionised companies. Those are the workers who were threatened by the new contract called CNE (a kind of CPE for people working in companies of less than 20 people, regardless of your age). They usually can't afford to go on strike as they can be sacked easily and have no unions to defend them. Consequently, if we wanted the movement to grow, we thought we had to try either to help them to go on strike, or to give them the possibility to do actions with us when striking was impossible.

We also had to take into consideration the failure of the “external commission”, the group of students (in which most of the Trotskyists operated) who for two months had tried in vain to make contacts with workers. Most of what they did was to give out leaflets calling for a general strike in front of Rennes' main factories (where the “productive” workers are) and then to organize “inter-professional” assemblies every week. Only 20 or 30 people,

mostly unionized, would turn up at these assemblies, either to say what their unions were prepared to do, or to report on the feeling among their work-mates about the movement: generally sympathetic, but not prepared to go on strike yet. So the role of these assemblies was purely informative and rarely led to any decisions that could lead to action. We thought it was urgent to try something else.

For us, one of the reasons why these assemblies were failures (in terms of numbers and of effectiveness) was to call workers to join in “as workers”. Precarity and unemployment has already changed people’s lives to the extent that a lot of them work without recognizing themselves as “workers”. You can be a student and be a worker, you can be unemployed and be a worker (as you can be working as well as getting the dole if your earnings are crap). More importantly, if you have to get a new job every 6 months (as most workers on temporary contracts have to) you don’t get the time to identify with your job or the will to fight in your specific workplace. Because of this, it seemed to us that it was necessary to ask people to join the movement not “as workers” but as “individuals” (even if we didn’t really like the term, we couldn’t find anything better. Some said “human being”). So we wanted to organise assemblies open to everybody : students, workers, unemployed and “none of the above”. We didn’t want people participating to feel that they had to be representative of their workplace or their union in everything they would say or do, but for them to be able to participate in these assemblies and possibly in future actions as they personally felt the need to.

These were the main points of the leaflet written that week-end in view of the first assembly to be organized on Tuesday afternoon (I include a translation of this leaflet at the end of the report) But first it had to be agreed by the student general assembly on Monday afternoon.

Monday the 3rd of April

The general assembly that afternoon gathered around 5000 students.

Votes that were carried, among other decisions:

-to continue the strike and to continue to block the university (by a clear majority)

-to condemn any union or organization that would call for the end of the strike if only the CPE was withdrawn.

Jarry’s “Super-male:” it’s just a corpse, but we can’t feel for a pulse to make sure it’s dead until we shut down the machine. That’s why in each one of its gears the desire for everything to stop is rising, and that’s also why its managers will stop at nothing to make sure it keeps on rolling.

13.

As long as there were revolutionary organizations and a revolutionary program, the only thing that mattered was the goal. For the revolution, all means were acceptable. And then, after the loss of all revolutionary perspective, came the social movements, where people get all worked up and agitated and congratulate themselves on being “all together,” without really knowing what for anymore. And since there’s a lack of a coherent goal, the means themselves start to fall apart. No one knows too well anymore how to do things, we just have experiences. We fight a bit with the cops, get a little rowdy at the demonstration, and have a good time during the occupations, and then when everything falls back into place everyone goes back to their studies, to their individualized fates, and we’ve made a few new friends. The social movements offer a comfortable way to not get too involved: they have a beginning, an apogee, and a denouement. And when Power rings the bell signaling the end of recess, no one has too many scruples about going back to rejoin the old ranks: no one had really drifted too far away from home. As for us, however, we’ve realized that we discovered our fate there, where we experienced joy; that the ends are contained in the means; that we have to attach ourselves to those practices which fill us with joy and with a spirit of being ourselves. “And the instant I became myself, that was living, that was life itself, a full life.” We read between the lines, and saw in our blockage of the economy and annihilation of the police the spark of a historically informed life, a life nothing could ever make us give up, no matter what happens.

14.

Hannah Arendt noted in 1970, when writing about the student agitation of the era: “The theoretical sterility of the movement and the heavy monotony of its analyses are even more striking and regrettable to see than the joy they encounter in their actions is... What makes one doubt this movement the most, as it has manifested itself in America and in western Europe, is the sort of curious hopelessness that seems inseparable from it, as if all the participants in it were convinced in advance that their movement would be crushed.” A magazine -- The Antenna -- commented in 1987 on the student movement of 1986 in these terms: “Everything seems to have happened as if the state of society had become extremely favorable to the surging forth of street movements which are exclusively “expressive,” as it were: sudden,

to a great extent, and in practice, by capitalism itself. All this participatory management, all these “advanced tasks,” all these individualized schedules and working conditions, all this rhetoric about motivation -- it was itself already a response, to the crisis of the classical wage system of the 70s, when a whole generation refused to work. What was being rejected in the CPE was thus neither the wage system nor its crisis, but the redefinition of work itself that resulted from that crisis; it was the element of subjection involved in contemporary work that mobilized us subjectively, and drove us to constitute ourselves as a socially-calibrated individuality. Firing people without reason is just a sanctioning of the new regime, wherein we get fired for being what we are, and not for doing what we’ve done, for our failure to come up to behavioral norms, not for any kind of infraction to any clause of any contract. So much so that the slogan “CPE no, no, no / CDI yes, yes, yes,” actually was less an expression of the servile desire to be exploited for eight hours every day like everybody else, and more a refusal to let work define us, a refusal to let it penetrate to ever further depths of our being. If work is no longer fundamentally defined to be a contractual exchange of a sum of money for a portion of time, but has now become this maniacal manufacture of conformist subjectivities, mannequins who never do anything but never stop working, then the old weapon of the general strike can be confined to the museum. The time has come for a human strike, starting with us giving up being what we are supposed to be, connecting with each other beyond the existing identities and codes, and finally overturning the whole universe of predictability. The time has come when, for once, those who do not work at all will be the ones to invent the new form of the strike.

12.

Blockading the universities has not only been a means of perturbing the enemy, of taking possession of territory. It was a preliminary, a means by which the blockaders could organize, and open the door to new situations -- blockading the colleges so we could go set up new blockades elsewhere. Very quickly, once they were freed from their collegiate worries, the students and high-schoolers started propagating their desire for everything to come to a stop. Instead of making requests to the union to declare a general strike, they propagated, on the railways, in the streets and highways, in the offices and in the malls, a human strike. What is true for the colleges is true elsewhere as well: on a bypass, when thousands of drivers come to a stop, turn off their engines, at last dare to get out of their cars, and start to discuss things with each other around a pallet-fire; in a sorting center when truck blockade permits the emergence of a common language quickly muzzled by the intervention of the police squads. This whole society makes one think of Alfred

-for the word “CPE” to be banned from all student banners in order to affirm more strongly that our demands were larger than the withdrawal of the CPE and that they included the withdrawal of the “loi de l’égalité des chances” (so-called “Equality of Opportunities” law) and of the “CNE”.

-to go and disturb the demonstration of the “anti-strikers” on Wednesday.
-the fact that our front banner would say “revolution”

-the fact that a group of students would do a press conference wearing balaclavas and holding false weapons in front of a banner saying “we won’t disarm”. (!!!)

-and, more importantly for us, our leaflet was accepted by the majority of the assembly of Rennes 2, as well as the assembly of the university Rennes 1.

As soon as the assembly was finished we tried to participate in the “external commission” to push forward our project of a “general meeting for workers, students, unemployed and nobodies”. The Trotskyists didn’t have much to oppose to our project, but they didn’t like the fact that we were turning up, out of the blue, in the “external commission”, taking everything in our hands, thus denying the laborious though unfruitful work that they had been doing for more than two months (which is understandable). It was thus agreed that they would continue to do “their” stuff (giving out very dull leaflets calling for a general strike in front of factories) and that we would do “our” stuff : distribute our leaflet during the demonstration of the following day and do some posterage for a general assembly of “Rennais”, workers or not.

Tuesday the 4th of April

(Second day of strike called by the union confederations)

The first action of the day was the blocking of the bus depot at 6am. The bus drivers weren’t able to go on strike as they had done the week before because the unions hadn’t deposited their strike warning on time. Consequently, some bus drivers had asked students to come and close the depot. I didn’t go to this action but I heard that 30 students had been enough to block the bus depot, mostly because the workers were happy to be blocked anyway. Only the managers were a bit of a pain. Still, the blockade lasted till 10am (not later to let people go to the demo) and prevented two thirds of the buses from operating. Obviously if the workers hadn’t been with us the managers could easily have called the cops and made us leave, as we were not enough to resist them.

At 11am we went to the demo in order to give out our leaflets. There were as many people as the previous week. It was said in the newspapers that there were less strikers in the public sector but more in the private sector. When the “planned” demo was finished, some (~1000) went to occupy the station, others the school’s inspectorate (and managed to climb on the roof) while around 5000 people did a “spontaneous demo”. At that point we went to the meeting / assembly we had called for in our leaflets, having prepared what we wanted to say, but having prepared no material (mikes, PA...) as we were expecting 100 at best. When we arrived, the unions (the most radical ones like SUD and the CNT) were already there, had brought with them their sound systems (with terrible music to entertain us), and were starting the meeting without us! And there were hundreds of people (the local newspaper even said a thousand). It didn’t go exactly as we wanted, as the unions were monopolising the thing, but we managed to make 5 or 6 long interventions to remind people why we had organised the meeting, in short, to organise a “comite de lutte Rennais” (Rennes committee of struggle), open to all, which would aim to organise actions against the normal functioning of the economy and try to provoke a general strike. A committee where people wouldn’t have to feel they have to represent their sector or their workplace, but where they could express themselves and take part in actions individually. We therefore asked people to come to the first meeting of this new committee the next day at the university. The rest of the meeting was quite boring as it was always the same five union guys speaking.

Immediately after the meeting some of us joined the “spontaneous demo”, which had meanwhile turned into a riot. There were still a few thousand people taking part. As usual it was taking place on the square next to the UMP local, as trying to get there was the easiest way to have a confrontation with the police. It was becoming a bit ritualised though and not really interesting as the police was used to clashes happening on that specific square and knew how to react : they would just throw lots of teargas at us till we retreated while pursuing us a few meters then stop, wait for us to come back, and then start again. They had cleared everything that could be thrown from the square as well. And it must also be said that, as with the week before, even if there were a few thousand people, only around one hundred were really prepared to fight. But the fact that all the others were prepared to stay even after having received teargas is still significant, and I didn’t hear of any problems happening with pacifists on that day. After a while, the riot moved on to the narrow cobblestone streets of the town centre. It meant everything was a lot more unpredictable, for the cops and for ourselves. Cops were arriving from everywhere, but it was easier to attack them, passers-by were also getting

of the economy and our attack on the forces of order, our interruption of commodity circulation, and the takeover of territory in this occupied country policed by the commodity system. We made use of the means we had available to us, and thereby entered into the insurrectionary process. And that’s something that the standard classification of “movements” doesn’t really include, and something the typical inconsistency of students in general is hardly predisposed towards. It’s something that requires, above all, a fierce determination to become materially organized.

11.

The struggle against the new youth employment law was supposed to be a struggle against “precarity.” That’s what the unions say: “precarity,” a confused and opportune little word, apparently evokes for them some kind of biblical plague on the wage-slaves, and by fixing on it they show their own attachment to the old order, to work itself. That’s what the newspapers say too, but of course they understand nothing. And it’s what the Negri-ist recuperators say too, seeing in it a new step towards their vision of an unavoidably forthcoming “guaranteed revenue,” a comical synthesis of socialism and cybernetics. The movement’s slogans have certainly done little to help clarify the debate. It was a weak reaction to somehow deduce that the proper response to “CPE, no, no, no,” was “CDI, yes, yes, yes,” [CDI=undetermined-duration working contracts] to defend, that is, the status quo of exploitation while it only gets worse; the radical reflex would have been to oppose to all of it a cry of “neither CPE nor CDI,” and to demand, not simply a “refusal of precarity,” but a “refusal of the wage system.” And indeed, floating above the occupied College of France was a banner reading “CPE or CDI, it’s all just forced labor (STO)” [STO=Obligatory Labor Service]. What’s really at play beneath the smoke-screen term, “precarity,” is not merely a new degradation of classical wage labor, but a whole redefinition of work itself. “Working” has for years and years meant “doing what you’re told to do,” but now working is means “being what you’re told to be.” Any trainee knows about the little smiles he’ll have to feign, the patronizing managerial jargon he’ll have to swallow, the enthusiastic submission he’ll have to demonstrate -- that is, the masks he’ll have to wear -- to get accepted into the business world. He knows how true it is that to become integrated into society means little more than to integrate this society into himself, and that to become integrated into a business means to integrate business into himself. Now, the two year “trial periods” that the CPE proposed -- that’s exactly how long it takes to become the mask you’re forced to wear, to take on the expected look, by mimicking it. If, in the final analysis, the anti-CPE movement only slightly criticized the classical wage system, that’s just because this critique has already been made,



Anti-CPE protests, France 2006

caught up in the thing. What we had to fear the most were the cops in civvies (the BAC, anti-criminality brigade) who in these situations were only wearing helmets and batons and for this reason could run very fast. They would attack isolated demonstrators and usually one of them would have a “flashball” gun pointed at the other demonstrators to prevent them from reacting. These “flashballs” are rubber bullets that immobilize you if you get one in the leg and can even kill you if you get it in the head (obviously cops tend to point them in direction of your head to scare you). Everybody was scared of them, on several occasions I saw people running away, shouting “flashball ! flashball !” However, I heard that at a point the demonstrators caught a group of BAC police who didn’t expect them at the corner of a street and managed to chase them, throwing stones at them. Some of the “anarchists” had prepared a technique: shouting a given word as a signal to throw all their stones at the same time. On a few occasions it had made the police retreat, to the applause of people around.

The “spontaneous demo” had started around 2 and finished around 7pm. At that point we went back to the university to prepare the actions for the following day.

Wednesday the 5th of April

We went to blockade the ring road at 6am. That time we were a bit less than the previous week, around 100. It was more difficult to find objects to use as barricades as the police had cleared most of them. For the first time we had brought some coffee and tea for the car drivers, and we had some very interesting discussions with some of them, drinking coffee together. There were more angry people than the previous week though, especially those that had already been blocked the previous week. That’s when I got head butted by a teenager in a car as I offered him some coffee. He didn’t expect me to hit back, and when I did he just went back to his car. A few lorry drivers tried to destroy our barricade again, without success. It took the police only 40 minutes to come and attack us that time, even if there were three simultaneous blockades on the ring road. After throwing lots of teargas at us, they blocked all the roads leading to the town centre. We were stuck in an industrial suburb, followed by the cops everywhere we went, for more than one hour. At the end, we had to all get in buses that were stopping in the area, and even then the police escorted us all the way to the town centre. Then we took the underground to the university, only to block the underground there. It was very easy as it was enough to just block the doors of one wagon to get the entire system blocked.



Students fight cops outside the Sorbonne, March 2006, Paris

groups' advantage. And every time, those individuals who've gotten separated from the mass march, with their freedom of expression and their right to be themselves, with all their right to have a cell phone, to have a bank account and dreadlocks, have still just ended up getting beaten up and traumatized. Traumatized by fifteen year old kids. And traumatized by having to make a cruel choice -- either to organize into small groups of their own, or else to end up laid out on the pavement. Because otherwise they have to face up to a heady fact -- only the police provide the conditions for the existence of the liberal individual. This is the obvious fact that the forces of order try to deny, after every confrontation, with their brutal attacks, in such bad faith.

8.

The community never experiences itself as identity, but as practice, as a practice in common. Identity comes galloping up every time practice withdraws. Wherever people occupy buildings, smash things up, tag walls, flip over cars, it's never a question of sociological origin, whether those people are high-schoolers from the slums or petty-bourgeois students.

9.

The youth employment law was a pretext, first of all. A pretext for mobilizations by the union organizations, a pretext for the student blockade, and for many people, a pretext for rebellion. Then, faced with the government bullying the people like they were just natives in the colonies, the new law became a question of honor. This was so much so that when it was retracted no one saw it as a victory, but only as the simple taking back of an insult. The principal emotional content of the movement was the feeling amongst the people that regardless of what the fuck they were bullshitting about, we were getting ripped off. It was an emotional reaction, restrained but powerful. And it was in pursuance of that restraint that the movement came to manifest radical practice, practice which was on the level of the great war of our era -- a war against the system, by attacking the police and blockading the economy. And at that point it had much in common with the Argentine picketers, the Algerian insurgents, and the rioters of November.

10.

The substance of a struggle is in the practices it adopts, not in the final goals it aims at. We spoke of a "pretext" here because though we charged towards the riot cops with cries of "annul the CPE," we could have used any other war-cry too to give us courage had we wanted to; and we weren't alone when we invaded the railways with shouts of "fuck the CPE, we're sick of having bosses." The effective content of the movement was our total blockade

sible. Even, possibly, a general explosion, and a dreadful end for this five-year administration”) worked wonders. Strasbourg, Nantes, Grenoble, Toulouse, Rennes, Lille, Drancy, Caen, Rouen -- never in the recent history of France have the downtown areas had such a regular succession of nights of rioting.

6.

It was the 21st of March, at the end of a demonstration involving college students and high-schoolers in Luxembourg. In front marched a group of 200 kids from the slums, and running the length of the march, starting after that group, was a line comprised of the forces of order, lined up along the sidewalks as the marchers passed. At one point the bureaucrats decided to change the course of the march, and the group which had been marching in front suddenly found itself trapped between the riot cops and the civilian “order-keepers.” Two days later came the march in Pensioners’ Plaza, the most hard-core demonstration yet, where those who had been excluded so amicably and cut off from the previous actions were looting and lynching. Go figure!

7.

Here’s two ways to move in the streets, when they become a hostile space belonging to the pigs, the cars, and the cameras: the march and the small band. The march: you arrive individually, get together for a few hours with your “comrades,” throw around a few slogans you hardly even believe anymore, and on enthusiastic days sing a few songs which would probably send chills down a few spines if they still meant anything, like the Internationale. A few loudspeakers conveniently cover up the silence of the assembly, and the emptiness of relations. Manu Chao, Zebda, La Brigada, etc. Then everyone, one by one, starts to feel at home again, and at leisure to think about things a little less. A digestive promenade for the unionized herd, a parade of solitudes guaranteed by the forces of order. The small band: you leave together. You take some equipment along with you. You have at least an inkling about what you’re going to be doing once you’re there. Fight the pigs, burn Paris, liberate the Sorbonne, loot some stores, steal some cellphones, have at it with some journalists or demonstrators, whatever. The group moves like a single person, a fifty-person individual. If one runs, everyone else runs too, if one gets in a fight they all do, and if one gets hit it’s an injury to all. Mob reflexes. Common jargon. A disposition to foolishness, to blind following, to lynching. An extreme mobility. Hostility to the unknown and to the immobile. These two kinds of movements have been seen in Paris over and over again in the past years. On March 8th of 2005, in particular, and then in the Pensioners’ Plaza. Every time, the confrontation has ended up to the small

We could hear a voice telling passengers that the underground wasn’t functioning “suite a des actes de malveillance” (because of malicious acts)!

We didn’t stay long (around 20 minutes) because being attacked in an underground station (with only one way out) by riot police was a very scary prospect.

We went back to the university, only to leave 1 hour later in order to go and disrupt the “anti-strikers” demonstration in front of the town hall.

The media said that we were 100 and that they were 200, but I really think we were at least as many as they were. We could see by their clothes to which camp they belonged: they really all looked like sensible students from well-off families. I’m sure that there were anti-strikers among poor students, but those were not demonstrating against the strike from what I have seen. The “anti-strikers” were also accompanied by 30 shopkeepers from the town centre, and a few right-wing personalities from Rennes especially the leader of the right-wing student union, l’UNI. However, because they had decided that their demonstration was “apolitical”, the only slogan they had was “Liberez nos facs” (free our universities) so the first thing we did was to invent slogans for them and sing them very loud! Like:

- * “Travail, famille, patrie, vive Sarkozy “
- * (“Work, family, nation, hurrah for Sarkozy”)
- * “Anti-grevistes en colere, le caviar il est trop cher”
- * (“anti-strikers are angry, caviar is too expensive”)

and lots of others of the same kind.

Then we ran after them while bleating at them, calling them “moutons” (sheep).

At the same time everybody was looking for “Valerie”, who we had chosen as the mascot of the “anti-strikers”. A few weeks before, she had come to one of the assemblies to speak against the strike, but her arguments were so poor, so blatantly reactionary and her personality so repellent that some anti-strikers voted for the strike on that day just to avoid being associated with her. Since then we wanted her to come to speak at all the assemblies, and we even made a banner saying, “Valerie, we love you”, which we hung from one of the university buildings. So from the beginning of the anti-strikers demo, we clamoured for a speech from Valerie. At one point some of us caught

her trying to hide and chased her while bombarding her with eggs! We even managed to steal the anti-striker's banner and started to burn it. A few of the right-wing personalities got pied as well. Then they did a sit-in (there were only 50 of them by that point) so we encircled them and pelted them with rotten eggs. They quickly dispersed at that point...

I have to say it was great fun!

At 7pm we went back to the university for the meeting of the Rennes committee of struggle that we had called for on Tuesday.

There were between 50 and 80 people, most of them union members or militants. I think it can partly be explained by the fact that the meeting was happening at the university, which is outside the town centre and maybe is an intimidating place to go for some. So in a way it wasn't a success. However, what was interesting was the fact that most of the union members present were saying that their own unions were not doing enough in this movement and that they didn't expect them to call for a general strike. These same people wanted to participate more in the movement, on an individual level, without having to refer to their unions or to worry if what they would be doing would be acceptable to their unions. We spent a long time discussing what this "committee of struggle" should be, which was made difficult by the presence in the gallery of a Trot who insisted that the committee should only be applying the decisions supposedly made at the initial open meeting on the Tuesday, so that it would be "representative". It seemed completely ridiculous to us, as only a few unionists had spoken on that occasion and nothing concrete had really been decided. We responded that what was important was that we were a group of people wanting to get organised to do stuff together, without bothering if we were "representative" or not. The Trot was constantly interrupting the meeting, and it's only when the whole assembly told him to shut up that he eventually did. In the end, the only things that were decided was to have an other meeting on Friday, preferably in the town centre, and that we should organise an action to block the normal activity of the shopping centre together on Saturday afternoon.

Thursday the 6th of April

Because Wednesday's blockade of the ring road hadn't been very successful, we wanted to try a different technique. Rather than having our meeting point directly on the rocade, we met at the university at 6am to decide where we would go at the last moment. But this failed as well: even if there had only been 15 minutes between the time we took the decision and the time we ar

order in the National Plaza," and finally "the youths from the slums, beating up demonstrators and looting in the Pensioners' Plaza." Semantically speaking, the term "window-breakers" had gone from one meaning to another: they weren't even smashing anything anymore; now they were lynching demonstrators. The term then appeared in its true colors: it was just a meaningless word only being used by the cops. The police have the monopoly on making up an image to attribute to the threat. By designating as elements foreign to the movement those people who were in fact the most dedicated participants in it, the cops made them foreign to their own offensive capacity, to their own seriousness. The image attributed to the threat, these days, is that it's the criminal immigrants doing this, that it's just those "barbarians from the slums." By alleging that every "foreigner" could potentially be a subversive, the forces of order insinuate that a good Frenchman would supposedly have no reason at all to become a subversive himself, when in reality there have never been so many Frenchmen who feel themselves no longer at home in the dismal decor of the capitalist metropolis.

4.

To paint on a banner "we are all window-breakers" isn't to say that you affirm yourself as a subject, to say you smash windows and cars, but rather is only a way to try to confuse the police and hinder the police operation going on. To see destruction as a political practice all you have to do is understand that the everyday existence of banks, shop-front windows, or franchise stores is actually just a moment in the course of a silent war. At the same time as the enemy destroys things, it also destroys all the evidence that they ever existed. And so there it breaks with the democratic management of conflicts, which accommodates ever so well all the little demonstrations against this or that thing, as long as no taking of positions is ever followed up by real effects.

5.

We are talking about a police operation. A distinction between gendarmes, unionists, journalists, bureaucrats and politicians would be a superfluous distinction, since their collusion is absolute. They all fit under the general heading of "police." The journalists' clichés have served the police inquests; when the union "order-keepers" beat up our comrades and handed them over to the riot cops the next day's morning papers made them look like heroes. They all collaborated to achieve one principal aim: to make sure that a consistent distinction was made between "window-breakers" and "demonstrators." And they only succeeded once -- March 23rd, in Paris. Everywhere else, the lack of a distinction so feared by the minister of the Interior (... "If there were a connection between the students and the slum kids, anything would be pos

a burning car, falling glass; they will always bring back the sound of a far off rumble of rioting.

The unionists, the leftists, and the militants have lived through another social movement. Once again. The “social movements,” with their rituals repeated hundreds of times and always defeated, are a kind of local demonstration of forbearance. They are part of our country’s folklore. Some think it a shameful part, some a glorious one. In any case, these movements are part of French democracy; they are moments of festivity, after which everything comes back to order. The governors can go ahead and play monarch as long as they let the population have the right to mimic the events of 1789. We, however, have lived through an event. An event is recognized by the intensity it produces -- using tree-grills to tear out the pavement from a tourist plaza together, coordinating Molotov cocktail attacks, discussing texts until the break of dawn -- everything from the errors it illustrates, to the possibilities it unveils. What we intend to discuss here is what was irreversible about the events, what no “end of the movement” could end; what made these last months not just a parenthetical remark within the regular course of social life, but a second wave, after the fires of November, in the sweet rising of the tide of insurrection.

1.

A slogan overheard in Rennes: “We are not pacifists. We are making war on capitalism.” The whole crowd took up the chant. Later, we saw pacifists defending a row of cops with paradoxical punches and kicks. In the end they were chased away from the protest. A banner reading: “We are all window-breakers,” voted on by the assembly at Rennes 2, became the watchword of a savage demonstration where Socialist Party offices, newspaper offices, banks, and employment agencies were all quite equitably trashed.

2.

It’s not a question of “violence;” there’s only sides to be chosen in a war that is already underway. The question, rather, is what the adequate means are for securing a victory.

3.

During the whole life of the movement there was a constant police operation going on, aiming to distinguish “good” demonstrators from “bad” window-breakers. During those weeks in Paris, “window-breaker” was a general term used to indicate, variously, the “anarcho-autonomists fighting police in front of the Sorbonne,” then “uncontrolled elements at odds with the forces of

rived at the ring road (we took the underground), the riot police were already there when we arrived. It is clear that they had been informed by somebody in our ranks, and that they had some police cars ready at different points of the rocade. It is clear as well that they had decided not to give us a chance this time. When we saw them on the rocade, we went to blockade one of the roads leading to it, but they followed us. So we started a spontaneous demonstration on the road, trying every now and then to run to shake them off and get to the ring road before them. As this didn’t work, we decided that we would go somewhere else, but that only 4 or 5 of us would know where we were going. So we took the underground, not knowing where we were going, and when we heard the signal we went out at a station that was very close to another point of the ring road. We ran to get on the road before the cops. We started to make a barricade but 5 minutes later riot police arrived and tried to encircle us. We started to run, the CRS in pursuit, batons flailing and after 5 minutes of running we managed to disperse without suffering any arrests. At 10am we had another meeting point to prepare an action against the ANPE (jobcentre). Some would get to the ANPE before the others, arriving at different times, pretending to be real job seekers. This way we could prevent the ANPE from closing the doors when the pack arrived. It transpired in fact that that wasn’t necessary, as the ANPE workers didn’t try to stop us, didn’t call the police, and smiled at us while we “demenaged” the place. We took everything out, even the folders and files, and moved all of this in the middle of a road nearby, to use as a sort of barricade. At that point we were around 200 and half of us were schoolchildren, so the atmosphere was very playful, with people singing and dancing. We stayed around an hour and a half, then we brought the furniture back, as some schoolchildren had promised to the ANPE workers.

We then went to the demo organised by the students and schoolchildren, which gathered around 5000 people. After an hour or so, it turned into a “spontaneous demo”, in the sense that nobody knew where we were going, but at the same time nobody had an idea of where we should go, so we ended up marching for hours without doing anything special. At one point though, some people managed to direct the demo towards the law university, a section of Rennes 1 that hadn’t been on strike at all, so we stormed the university, disturbing all the lessons. In one lecture theatre, 50 law students were listening to the lesson when a group of 100 people went in and started to sing the international, banging on the chairs and tables, throwing stuff at the teacher and pretending to fight on the stage. Another group of around 50 students managed to enter the UNI (right-wing student union) local and destroyed absolutely everything that was in it. After an hour the demonstra

tion left, continued for a while and then ended up doing a sit-in front of the town hall.

I left on Friday morning.

I read that, on that day, 50 students blocked a sorting office for a few hours, and that the workers there stopped working in solidarity with the demonstrators.

On Monday Villepin announced his decision to withdraw the CPE. It was therefore a decisive moment to see if enough students would be prepared to continue the strike in order to demand the withdrawal of the “Equal of Opportunities” Law and the CNE, the two other demands that the movement had made. At that afternoon’s general assembly which gathered 5000 students, a majority (~2700 against ~2300) decided that the occupation had to end. On Wednesday though, a new assembly was organised, to which 7000 attended. That time, people counting the votes announced that there were more students for the occupation than against, even if some said it was very difficult to tell. The president of the university refused to consider the decision legitimate, but seeing that the tension between pro- and anti- occupation was escalating, he decided to wait till the following Tuesday before allowing the lessons to resume. Some strikers discussed the possibility of preventing the reopening of the university by doing a picket line on Tuesday morning. It failed though, and the 100 students or so who turned up could do nothing to prevent the university from reopening.

It is difficult to know exactly what made the two assemblies reach these contradictory decisions. It might be that some students, in favour of the strike, hadn’t bothered to come to the assembly on Monday, thinking that the strike would be voted as easily and automatically as before, and that these students were present on Wednesday. But, anyway, even if 3500 students were still in favour of continuing the strike after the withdrawal of the CPE, only a small minority had the energy and the motivation to fight against the reopening of the university.

Jeanneneton

Annexe : leaflet calling for the assembly of workers, students, schoolchildren and unemployed on Tuesday the 4th of April (translation).

Meeting

COMMITTEE IN EXILE* FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ.

preface:

the c.p.e. was a law instituted by the french government that would allow companies to fire younger workers for any reason whatsoever during the first two years of their employment. the passage of this legislation was the spark that set the fires of march 2006 in france.

-- the translator.

The students have gone back to their studies. The colleges have reopened their doors and the professors have reopened their shit-eating mouths. The planetary cycle of life-in-small-doses will end, as expected -- as always -- in June: the tests will be administered and then we’ll all deserve our vacation in the sun. Everything would seem to indicate a perfect return to normalcy, if it wasn’t for how forced it all seems. Back to doing things as if nothing had happened, as if a completely different kind of normalcy had not arisen during the two months of the occupation. A normalcy where the amphitheaters were suddenly dormitories, where neighbors were suddenly either comrades or enemies, where other beings became desirable in the struggle, rather than remaining only seductive, as the customary separation would have it. The truth is, a bit too much has been made of the tiny world of the university. There’s a kind of feverishness, a kind of exaggeration in expressions, a clumsiness characteristic of a work in progress: a gathering awareness that life could be something different, that we could live a life not necessarily so similar to that of hamsters in a cage.

And, in effect, there is no return to normalcy.

There is, rather, a normalization process: a war by other means against the persistence of the event. We aren’t talking about a simple process of becoming conscious of facts already commonly admitted: about the movement’s having ended, about the union’s police-function, about the necessary recourse to head-cracking, or about the joy of life which came forth from blocking the economy rather than letting itself be held back so that one day it might serve it, or the return of fire as an elementary practical politics. We are talking about friendships. Every friendship retains a trace of the conditions of its origin, of the moment of the first meeting. The friendships made in those days will always have an odor of tear gas about them, a little spark of

Tonight Tuesday 4th April 21h

To realise calls for unlimited strike action and the blocking of the economy.

The movement we started eight weeks ago against the CNE and the so called « Equality of Opportunities » law (of which the CPE is a part) is now reaching a decisive turning point. The use of the 49.3, followed by the promulgation of the CPE, after the students and schoolchildren coordinations had demanded their unconditional withdrawal, leaves no room for an agreement. By arresting and charging hundreds of people at each demonstration, by threatening to use the police to break the strike in secondary schools, the government is not afraid of declaring open war against us.

This situation urgently requires that we take sides. The struggle, if it is extended to other sectors, can offer us all an unprecedented opportunity to reverse 25 years of liberal counter-revolution ; if it stays confined to the youth, its defeat in isolation will be the defeat of the social movement as a whole, and this for a long time. As the defeat of the movement against pension reforms (2003) showed, there is no doubt that selective days of strike action and demonstrations won't be enough. The victory of the movement requires the generalization of the strike and of the blockade of the economy, and the necessary mass participation in actions capable of effectively putting pressure on the government.

We can't count solely on the union leadership to immediately constitute, locally, an unlimited force that would gather together all the wage workers, schoolchildren, students, unemployed and people affected by precarity who are themselves determined to promote this generalization. We called for this meeting to take place in order to contribute to the creation of a Rennes committee of struggle, open to all those who reject the liberal policies which are currently being implemented. The question isn't simply to manifest one's support for the students anymore, but to get organised to confront a governmental offensive which affects all socio-professional categories.

Tonight's meeting will not constitute an 'interprofessional assembly' where we will be content to repeat that indeed 'the situation demands a general strike, but.....' We don't expect simply that those present attend as 'representatives' of 'their' workplaces where the situation isn't 'ripe' enough ; our invitation is aimed at those, wherever they may come from, who desire to take part, immediately, in blocking the economy (trains, roads, industrial zones), and to



Students are stopped by gendarmes as they demonstrate near the Sorbonne university in Paris, March 10, 2006

generalise work stoppages. Those that want to promote unlimited strikes in key sectors of the economy. We feel the urgency of organising actions immediately, knowing that the government is waiting for the school holidays and to blackmail with the upcoming exams in order to weaken us. As such this committee could resolve itself to an inaugural action from Wednesday.

It's up to us to go on the offensive.

General Assembly of the students of Rennes 1 and 2

things it is stupid.

Revision #11: This is the end of the marches and the days of action declared by central committee. Only wild demonstrations and occupations from now on. The assembly of strikers in Rennes already prefers demonstrations with "intuitive routes", and refuses to submit to the routes ordained by the police and its henchmen. Even their marshals have a new role, and a new name: they are now the "action division" and are preparing to confront the police if they have to.

Revision #12: No one has the right to tell us that what we are doing is "illegitimate". We don't have to see ourselves as spectators of the struggle, even less should we see ourselves from the point of view of the enemy. Legitimacy belongs to those who believe in their actions, to those who know what they are doing, and why they are doing it. This idea of legitimacy is obviously opposed to that of the State, majority, and representation. It does not submit to the same rationales, it imposes its own rationales. If the politicizing consists in a struggle of different legitimacies, of different ideas of happiness, our task from now on is to give means to this struggle with no other limit but what appears to us to be just and joyful.

up to break the strike, the only thing to do is to abolish them by all means necessary.

Revision #7: A strange idea haunts this movement, the idea of occupying university buildings only during work hours. This is an occupation that does not liberate space. An occupation where firefighters, administrators, and pretexts of authority and safety continue to make us childish, and where the university will remain simply a university. It's true that once we've taken over this space, we would need to populate it, populate it with things other than the desire to return to normal. We have to embrace with serenity the fact that there will be no return to normal, and then inhabit this irreversibility.

Revision #8: National coordination reflects the sterility of a certain classic notion of politics. The unionists, the million leftist groups and groupings offer to lifeless general assemblies platforms written in advance by their leadership. In atmosphere approaching that of yet another party congress, the national coordination displays nothing but a soviet-style power play between the "orgs". We propose instead the idea of a parallel coordination following the example of the high-school students' movement of last year, an open coordination (consulta) that is nothing but a temporary space to refine a national strategy.

Revision #9: We are the heirs of the failure of all the "social movements" and not just those of the last three years (teachers, retirees, seasonal workers, high-school students), but many more dating back to at least 1986. We have learned some lessons from these failures. The first is about the media. By becoming the echo of the movement, the media effectively becomes a part of it, a part which, when it pulls out (usually at the same time as the union bureaucracies) provokes the movement's collapse. The strength of a movement is in its effective power, not in what is being said about it, and the malicious gossip about it. The movement must protect itself by all means, even by force if necessary, from the grasp of the media. It must develop its own voice.

Revision #10: None of the "social movements" of recent years has achieved in months of "struggle" what the insurgents of November discretely obtained in three weeks of riots – cuts to public assistance in the affected areas were suspended, funding for local programs was reinstated. All of this without making any demands. Demanding means defining your existence in the mutilating terms of those in power, it means conceding an advantage to the enemy. Even from the point of view of those who want to gain certain



Police attack students at La Sapienza University, Rome. March 2009

An Update by the Sorbonne Occupation Committee in Exile

Communique # 4

March 20, 2006

The Sorbonne University with its airs of eternity. Full of suspended history. Marble hallways like a frozen swamp. "When there is no sun, learn to ripen under the ice." Then ten days ago, the ice started melting, one evening in centuries. A fire of tables and final papers: a flame higher than any man, in the middle of the quad, the quad of ceremonies. No more murmurs in the lecture halls, and in the hallways, no more discourses, just jostling together, searching for a structure. It begins. Projectiles, screams, fire extinguishers, chairs, ladders, against the cops. A monster awakens.

The authorities are stupid. They run around. They think that by evicting us they have destroyed the blast that emerged here. Fools. Fools as dull and the heavy thud of a computer on the helmet of a riot cop. By sending us in exile they only broadened our field of action. They will get their just desserts for taking from us our Sorbonne, for having dispossessed us. By installing their police here, they offered the Sorbonne to all the dispossessed. At this hour when we are writing this the Sorbonne does not belong to the students anymore, it belongs to all those who, by the word or the cocktail, mean to defend it.

Since our exile, we've had some thoughts on the state of the movement.

Revision #1: We are fighting against a law passed with a majority vote by a legitimate parliament. Our simple existence proves that the democratic principle of majority vote is questionable, it proves that the myth of the sovereignty of the general assembly can be usurped. It is part of our struggle to limit, as much as possible, the tyranny of the majority vote. All that space given to the general assemblies paralyses us and only serves to confer legitimacy on paper to a bunch of wannabe bureaucrats. The assemblies are neutralizing all initiative by establishing a theatrical separation between the word and the act. Once the vote has been cast for a strike until the withdrawal of

the law for equal opportunity, the general assemblies should become a space of endless debate, a space for sharing experiences, ideas, and desires, a place where we constitute our strength, not a scene of petty power struggles and intrigues for swaying the decision.

Revision #2: The union bureaucracies, even though they continue with their habitual manipulations, are not as serious an obstacle to the real movement as the reflexes of pacifism that spread amongst us. The night of the eviction of the Sorbonne, part of the students had no idea why they were there or what they could do, let alone what they should do. They were wandering in anguish of the freedom offered but impossible to grasp, because it was not desired. A week later, after numerous occupations and confrontations with the police, their asserted impotence is finally giving place to an innocent taste for direct action. Pacifism finally becomes what it has never stopped being: a benign existential pathology.

Revision #3: The struggle belongs to those who fight, not to those who want to control it.

Revision #4: The constant movement, the circulation of everything is a paradoxical condition for the functioning of the capitalist machine. In the same paradox, interrupting its functioning is a condition for its disruption. By the blockades, we are fighting against the total freeze of the situation they want to impose.

Revision #5: We are referring to 68, it is true, but we are referring not to what actually happened in 68, to the folklore, the occupied Sorbonne back then, the barricades in the Latin Quarter, we are referring to what did not happen in 68, the revolutionary turmoil that did not take place. By casting us in the past, some would like to extract us from the present situation and to make lose the strategic understanding of it. By treating 68 as a simple student movement, they would like to dismiss the still present menace of what 68 could have been, a savage general strike, a burst of a human strike.

Revision #6: The idea of democratically debating every day those who are against the strike on the renewal of the strike is absurd. The strike has never been a democratic practice, but a political accomplished fact, an immediate expropriation, a relationship of power. No one has ever voted the establishment of capitalism. Those who oppose the strike are de facto standing on the other side of the barricade, and the only exchange we could have with them is of insults, punches and rotten eggs. In the face of referendums set