

On May 17, after the first events at the Sorbonne, three tenants in the Maine-Montparnasse complex invited a few students to come and explain their problems to the inhabitants of the building in the context of the "100 Meetings."¹⁹ Our goal was a specific but rather narrow one: to contact the interested tenants and to decide together whether there was cause to form an Action Committee in our building.

This call brought out about twenty people on the terrace of our building. A discussion started but was quickly interrupted by a shower of projectiles from tenants who obviously did not want their terrace to be transformed into a forum. We were thus obliged to accept the hospitality of one of the organizers in order to continue safe from eggs, boiled potatoes and water bombs! This retreat was good for our discussion. We introduced ourselves: a photographer, an economist, a journalist, a psychologist, various executives, and we soon understood that each of us was already sensitized to the student problem and even to issues going well beyond it. During this first meeting we decided to form an Action Committee in our building and set the date for the first meeting in a room near our place.

THE STRIKE PICKET ASKS FOR HELP

This meeting revealed that around fifty people were willing to come at least for information and that many young people from the neighborhood were ready to participate actively in whatever the present gathering might decide to do.

From its inception, the Committee was oriented toward helping the strikers. Its activities took many forms and were especially concerned with the strikers at companies in the Maine-Montparnasse complex: the Postal Sorting Center, the Pullman Company, the construction site of the third sector and the Montparnasse railway station itself. It goes without saying that before May there had never been any contact between the workers and the tenants of Maine-Montparnasse.

The strike picket at the Mail Sorting Center had to guard very large premises with numerous entrances; although their numbers were sufficient they had a security problem. A telephone tree was devised: the strikers called four telephone numbers belonging to tenants in the build-

19. This complex consists of several gigantic modern buildings in the south of Paris that stand out like a sore thumb of modern urbanism in the midst of the old city.

JOURNAL OF A NEIGHBORHOOD ACTION COMMITTEE

We publish here a report written collectively for the *Cahiers de Mai* by the members of the Maine-Montparnasse Neighborhood Action Committee.

18. The SMIG is the minimum wage.

ing and these latter called four others, etc. Thus in an emergency we could contact the maximum people in a minimum of time (seven minutes). We had an opportunity to test the effectiveness of this system when the "fascists" came to "say hello" to the strikers. But as soon as they saw us they fled, understanding clearly what was going to happen to them! Also, every night four or five members of the Committee waited for dawn with the strikers. It was more a question of maintaining their morale than of offering material aid.

Relations with the strikers of the construction site were different. The strike picket we contacted answered that they had no special problems but that they would be happy to have coffee at night! So, every night we brought them bottles of coffee. Of course we rotated the task because they needed the coffee around midnight when the night really begins.

THE PARTIAL RETURN TO WORK DOES NOT STOP OUR STRUGGLE

Then on Tuesday, June 5, new problems arose: new supplies of gas having arrived the preceding weekend (Pentecost), the government announced the general return to work. The building construction union had not reached an agreement with management; the companies of the Maine-Montparnasse construction site announced the re-opening for Tuesday morning. The strike picket asked for our help: their strikers were not numerous enough to take on those who would want to return to work. They wanted many of us to come, not to stop workers from entering the construction site, but to talk with them to try to show them that the strike will have been wasted if they go back to work before an agreement has been reached. For our part, we asked for reinforcements from the other committees in the 14th District, from the extreme left organizations in the area, and from occasional students we had met. From 70 to 100 people were at the construction site at six in the morning: there were almost as many workers (mostly foreigners) as agents of management and foremen. The Strike Committee gave no instructions, everyone argued amongst themselves and the confusion was total. We did not know whether to block the entrance to the construction site or not. It seemed awkward for us, an Action Committee, to make such a move.

After two hours, management got the workers into the construction site (which was closed to us) and organized a vote (that was more than slightly fixed) in favor of the return to work. The vote was by so-called



"secret ballot" and not by raised hands; in fact an employee of management went around with a notebook and asked each worker individually whether he was for the return to work! He noted down something for each answer. The return to work won! 100 voters for a thousand workers! Sixty percent in favor of the return to work, essentially executives and branch heads! And dozens of foreign workers who do not understand our language, who do not know what they are asked and who, in any case, know that they may be deported for their answer. However, when it was explained to them that they had answered "yes" to the return to work, they went and asked the organizers of the "vote" to annul their answer. "Too late," they were told, "you have voted."

We could not intervene in any way; that would have given the bosses an opportunity to call the police and to expel those who did not belong on the construction site. The police came anyway, called by an inhabitant of the Avenue de Maine who was afraid of fights! Helmets, billy clubs, tear gas were supposed to make "everyone" reasonable again. In fact, young people were asked more or less rudely to move on.

Of the twenty or so companies which participated in the construction work, only two had union representation. In the others the workers, most of them foreigners, went on strike to follow "the movement" while hoping to benefit from it. They went on strike for two weeks without even presenting a list of demands and without having established intercompany contacts. Very quickly, in a neighboring café, around fifteen workers wrote up a leaflet with us affirming the solidarity of all the companies on the construction site, presenting demands, and asking the workers to discuss them freely before returning to work. Lacking means to print the leaflet, our comrades from the construction site asked us to do it for them and to come back the following day to help with distribution.

On the practical level our action met with failure, since in the end management got what it wanted. But we contributed to a beginning of awareness and organization among the workers of Montparnasse. It is a good question why no more established organization than our committee had thought of doing this.

UNION DELEGATES AND PULLMAN WORKERS

The relations between the Pullman employees and our committee were fraternal, but they did not ask us for practical aid. And so we discussed the Events daily and went on little "sorties": for instance, one

day we went and removed the posters which an ad agency put up for the incumbent deputy from "la Malène" and, in order to re-establish a certain balance in the decoration of the neighborhood, we put up posters from the Peoples' Studio about our committee or the companies of Montparnasse.

We had a few problems with the Montparnasse railroad station itself. From the inception of our committee, we went to see the railway workers' strike picket to offer it our services. We were very well received and our position understood, but since no union leaders were present the railway comrades advised us to go to see them at neighborhood inter-union headquarters. There we were extremely ill received! Apparently the "leaders" took us for organized "ultra-leftists" and we were therefore welcomed as is fitting in such cases! Unfortunately, one of the members of the committee who went to the inter-union headquarters was a communist known as such by the union leaders, and so relations deteriorated. The railwaymen let us know through one of their leaders that they did not wish to establish contacts with us. We nevertheless understood that the aforesaid leader spoke only in his own name.

A DIFFICULT TRANSITION: FROM STRIKES TO ELECTIONS

During the period when strike support constituted our main activity, we rarely asked basic questions. But this changed as soon as the elections became certain. Our Action Committee is composed of members who have in common their district, their good will and their leftist ideas. We are more or less aware that some of us belong to the Communist Party, to the P.S.U., to organizations such as U.J.C.M.L., or the J.C.R., the anarcho-syndicalists, while others are members of the CGT, or simply non-affiliated and unpoliticized, but no one ever tries to impose the point of view of his organization on the Committee. On the contrary, everyone is free and engages in spontaneous discussion during the writing up of a leaflet, the creation of a poster, or the organization of a meeting. In the weekly discussions we organize, compromises are rare and a common line of action stands out clearly.

The preparation for the elections created some dissension. It turned out that the majority was for abstention, but only the majority! We discussed this at length but, as ever, action united us. Perhaps the best proof was the meetings we held in the neighborhood as often as possible. There, whether each of us was for or against the elections, we all knew how to explain what they represented in the framework of the

present Constitution with its system of voting. In this regard, it is worth stressing the success of these meetings. It was so great that when we cannot organize a meeting in the usual places, the residents of the neighborhood show up alone to talk. Later they ask us in the street why we did not come, what is happening now, etc.

NEW WAYS OF COMMUNICATING: MEETINGS IN THE STREET

We decided to have a bulletin board to broaden our means of communication. We posted articles from the daily press, from *Action*, leaflets, documents and photographs of the events at the Edgar Quinet market as well as at the exit of the Montparnasse subway station in front of the movie theater.

As experience showed again and again, discussions started thanks to people who insulted us, and then others came to our rescue and things really got going! It was impossible to hold just one discussion and numerous groups formed on different subjects: history, current events, politics, intellectual and union affairs, social problems, etc. It is hard to classify the hundred or so people who participate each time in our discussions. There is a bit of everything. In the first place we are there, overwhelmed by the crowd but also helped by passersby. Each group, from three to six people, is led by those who are most directly concerned by one of these problems. Examination of contemporary events interests those who are younger and more middle class. They tend to agree with the student demands (which are their children's), and are easily led on to social problems. History is generally of interest to Gaullists or members of the extreme right who try to justify themselves; we have been astonished to hear the name of Pétain, who still attracts sympathy: "It was thanks to Pétain that the Resistance could exist!"²⁰ The various unions are, of course, analyzed by the workers who all agree on the ambiguous role of the CGT, but not on how to lead or end the strike.

And then there are the old people. There are two kinds: those who say they are satisfied with their lot and who answer, when asked if they could manage in case of serious illness, "Oh well, if you ask questions

20. Pétain was the chief military leader of France in World War I, and in his old age accepted the political leadership of defeated France in World War II. He briefly ruled a rump French republic in alliance with Germany from the town of Vichy. After the War he was condemned to life imprisonment for treason.

like that," or "We are old, we hardly need anything"; and those who astonish us with their political ideas and their revolutionary force (especially the women). After a long discussion on socialism in France, an old woman concluded with a smile: "The only thing I'm still skeptical about is the possibility of changing man!"

Every day of course new themes are discussed, but the following question is always posed: "With what do you propose to replace the present government?" After having explained that our final goal is still the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, we underline our original position with respect to changes in government. By contrast with the traditional political parties, we propose no personality, no tendency. Unlike these parties we as an Action Committee do not want to discuss possible solutions with anyone who has vested political interests (precisely these parties). With this answer we hope to communicate that this problem concerns each of us.

THE RELATIONS WITH ORGANIZED MOVEMENTS

Politically, our Action Committee has no defined ideology. When we agree with the instructions of the Coordination Committee of the Sorbonne, or the Rue Serpente, we carry them out; thus, we participated in all the demonstrations organized by UNEF and the S.N.E.Sup. (to the great surprise of the tenants of Maine-Montparnasse who were astonished to see a group of demonstrators, led by a red flag, lining up in their building). We are truly autonomous with respect to all organizations of students, young people or others. The only disputes we have are little fights over posters with the Communist Party and over "zones of influence" in the neighborhood.

There is in fact a center for 14th District Action Committees where material is organized and distributed. The other Action Committees of the district are not formed on the same recruiting base as ours; there is a March 22 Action Committee, and an Action Committee of the U.J.C.M.L. (*Union des Jeunes Communistes, Marxiste-Léniniste, a Maoist sect*). For instance, a common demonstration was decided upon, limited just to our district. We were to go around to the local companies and show our solidarity. The Maine-Montparnasse Committee arrived in large numbers, but we could tell right away that this demonstration was more representative of the U.J.C.M.L. than of the Fourteenth District Action Committees in terms of the slogans, press, leaflets, and participants (who, even if they did not all live in the neighborhood, belonged to the

U.J.C.M.L.) One part of our Action Committee left the demonstration for that reason while the other half remained for the sake of unity, but this explains why our participation was not all that positive. We were rather ill-received by the companies in our neighborhood! Indeed, long nocturnal discussions with strikers had finally convinced them that we belonged to no political group (especially those against which the CGT union delegates were struggling) and our participation in that demonstration showed the contrary; the comrades of our Action Committee had a hard time reestablishing good relations with the strikers. We want to stress that these little problems of relations with organized movements are not ideological but purely tactical. It is, incidentally, amusing to see the members of our Action Committee serve as intermediaries between ourselves and the political organizations to which they belong. It really facilitates relations!

But after that demonstration on June 3, we have been taking care that the leaflets we receive from the 14th District Center, signed by the Action Committee of the 14th, are not excessively oriented towards denunciation or abstentionism. We just want any leaflet like that to be distributed with a signature and thus to be the responsibility of the Action Committee that wrote it.

The Maine-Montparnasse complex is a good illustration of "segregated" urbanism: total segregation inscribed in the very conception of the building, in the walls and the elevators; separation between the offices, between the workplaces and the inhabitants; separation between the "new" and the old quarter; separation between the apartments within the building itself. They are all comfortable (and expensive) but there are no places for social life, no playground for children.

May 1968 has been stronger than the walls. All these separations have broken down; tenants and workers in the complex and inhabitants of other streets in the neighborhood have finally started to struggle together, to get to know each other, to become friends. The Committee has become one of the public realities of the neighborhood, through its posters, its small meetings, the distribution of *Action* and the *Cahiers de Mai*, its leaflets and demonstrations.

Two examples show this:

—on the evening of the Gaullist demonstration on the Champs-Élysées, a Gaullist tenant tried to show off his power in the building by hanging a *tricolore* flag with a Lorraine Cross in his window. No doubt he was unaware of the size of our Action Committee, for his weapon turned against him when the immense facade of Maine-Montparnasse was covered with red flags (slacks, sweaters, table cloths, the red part of the

tricolore, etc). Without the Action Committee, no tenant would have dared to believe in such an exhibition of red; it was our first victory.

—despite the difficulty of raising hard cash, our campaign brought in a little more than 2000 Francs. Indeed, people have confidence in us for they know us and they give more easily to us than to strangers. We brought this sum to the strikers at the mail sorting office for them to distribute among the different companies on strike, but they informed us immediately that their strikers were not in urgent need and they proposed to give it to Renault. And so it was done.

THE NEXT CHAPTER REMAINS TO BE WRITTEN . . .

The next chapter is not yet written, we are living it (internal economic questions, political discussions, education, library, invitations to specialists, meetings, etc. . . .) with all the others in the factories, in the universities, in the neighborhoods; we are carrying on the movement.

The next day the whole city was scandalized by the brutality of the CRS. Here, as at Nanterre, every advance of the repression brought with it a widening of the struggle. A university strike began which lasted several days; the students held discussions with their professors and distributed leaflets in the factories. Note that during this period the UEC (Union of Communist Students, affiliated with the Communist Party) had the same treacherous policy as at Nanterre, avoiding these early acts of contestation and even denouncing "anarchist provocateurs" the day after the police beatings!

After that until Easter there was only a small demonstration on March 15.

But the Paris events had repercussions in Nantes from the beginning of May. On May 7 students and professors began a strike in connection with the national movement. On May 8 they participated out of solidarity in the worker and farmer demonstrations. It should be said that contact with the workers' unions, which was rather cold at first, improved in and through the common struggle.

The FO, the CFDT and the CGT (not without reservations) later agreed to collaborate, culminating in student participation in the Central Strike Committee from May 30 on. Before this, when Sud-Aviation started a wildcat strike on May 14, the students rushed in with moral and material support (money, blankets taken from the dorms). They were everywhere, reinforcing the picket lines; they defended the road blocks alongside the truckers (see the article "Toward Self-Defense").

Thanks to the dynamism of their struggle the students rallied new troops: the conservative colleges (law, pharmacy, medicine), disgusted by the violence of the cops, rushed headlong into the fight. In the Law School, they refused to take the exams and proclaimed their autonomy. The high school students also followed after May 11, when they invaded the Nantes railway station together with the college students. They formed High School Action Committees and from then on participated in all the activities.

The legitimacy and efficacy of the more radical forms of action [were] mainly imposed by the students—and all the other young people with them. Sanctions were imposed by the chancellor's office after the incidents of February 14; the 10,000 franc scholarship was canceled. Petitions and protests were unsuccessful. But when, after the unitary demonstration of May 13, students and workers fought at the Prefecture, they obtained satisfaction on those two points by showing their force and resolution. Even the most militant did not preach violence for its own sake; yet like the farmers, they observed that given the authoritarian

THE UNIVERSITY AS A RED BASE

The students of Nantes played the same role in their city as the Nanterre "enragés" played in the later paralysis of the country as a whole. Against the background of the farm crisis, they were the catalysts of the general movement of contestation.

As early as the first quarter, a few trouble-makers posed the problem of sexual segregation in the dormitories. Having obtained the repeal of the house rules (as at Nanterre a little later), the students felt the need to go beyond the framework of their own problems by supporting the struggle of the employees in the dorms and the cafeterias; it was largely because of the students that 75 percent of the personnel were unionized at the end of December.

At the beginning of the second quarter, the same activists picketed the cafeteria "to protest against working conditions and wages"; they took over the leadership of UNEF and the MNEF (January 20th) not to strengthen those institutions but to use the material means they had at their disposal.

February 14 was a key date, a national day of protest by dorm residents; the demonstration and the invasion of the Chancellor's office ended with a treacherous attack by the police. There were numerous wounded and arrests.

nature of the present regime the only way to be heard is through violence in the streets.

On the other hand, the Faculty of Letters has had the interesting idea of organizing discussions on parochial schools for the last ten days. Fifty percent of the pre-baccalaureate students are in Catholic education.³⁷ Thanks to the general climate of cultural revolution this was the first time that the problem had been squarely faced by teachers from the public and private sector. Thus a decisive step was taken towards the unification of education right in the middle of Chouan country.³⁸

Sectarian divisions between leftist students have become secondary thanks to the struggle. Farmers and workers visited the university out of curiosity, but this can be the start of a true opening of the universities to the people. Right now the students are struggling on two fronts:

—Within, they are trying to prevent reformist co-optation. Certain students do not understand the depth of the present crisis: the absurdity of exams, the anti-democratic character of admissions policy, the isolation of studies from the problems of real life. Instead of looking for solutions together with the workers and farmers, they just seek piecemeal reform, or they accept Gaullist objectives inscribed in the Fifth Plan.

—On the outside, they participate actively in the strike and are already thinking about the organization of a People's University for the future. Banners in all their demonstrations demand the admission of all young workers to the inexpensive student cafeteria. The farmers' unions have been contacted to coordinate with the campuses the professional education required for the development of proletarianized agricultural workers.

Six months ago everybody said: "You students criticize everything, you want to destroy everything, but you don't know what to put in its place. There will be chaos!"

Today, in the course of the struggle, day care centers have been improvised on all the campuses and, more generally, new forms of organization have emerged.

This confidence in the creativity of the movement is the greatest contribution of student agitation.

37. The French baccalaureate is equivalent to an American high school diploma.

38. The Chouan participated in a counterrevolutionary movement during the French Revolution of 1789. This region of France was long noted for its Catholic and reactionary politics.

NANTES: A WHOLE TOWN DISCOVERS THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE

(This is the collective account of a trip to Nantes made by three comrades from Nanterre University: Bernard Conein, Bernard Granotier and Henri Fournie.)³⁹

WORKING CLASS COMBATIVITY IN THE OCCUPIED FACTORIES

We chose two companies as tests of working class combativity: Sud-Aviation Bouguenais and A.C.B. (ship building). Numerous discussions with worker unionists also enabled us to get an idea of the degree of class consciousness among the workers of Nantes; in particular, we attended meetings of the railroad workers' inter-union Strike Committee.

Contact with the Sud-Aviation Bouguenais factory seemed especially important to us since this was the first company occupied by its workers, and played the role of "detonator" in unleashing the general strike.

The factory is situated on the edge of Nantes. Today it looks like a regular fortress; successive barricades control the entry into the factory area. Every 20 meters there are picket lines (21 in all), ready to respond to any attack from the outside. Thugs from the C.D.R. (Committee for Republican Defense, a right-wing group) were expected that evening.

The CGT has the majority at Sud-Aviation with 800 votes, then comes the CFDT with 700 votes, then the CGT-FO with 300 votes. CGT pickets are suspicious of contacts with students; the worker-student link is made at point 16, the picket of the hourly FO workers, who have taken a revolutionary syndicalist line.

It all began with a demand for shorter hours without lower wages. After management refused to consider the workers' demands, the CGT and the CFDT called for a slow-down on May 1, the FO demanding an unlimited strike with factory occupation. May 7, two days before the first full day of the strike, the boss fled, pursued by 35 workers. He succeeded in getting away. May 10, discussions with management degenerated into a farce. The unions' policy of striking every half hour was reaffirmed by a vote which also rejected the CGT and FO proposal for a total strike without factory occupation.

39. This preferatory note was written by the editors of the journal in which this article appeared.

Tuesday, May 14, the half hour strikes continued, but around 3 P.M. three union delegates decided to chase the white collar employees out of their offices and to lock the boss in his office. Some white collar employees joined the sequestered boss. A guard was set up in front of his door. To keep the boss from getting bored, a loudspeaker playing ear-splitting revolutionary songs was installed next to his door, which no doubt enabled him to learn the *Internationale* by heart without ideological strain. But the sound was so loud it annoyed the union guard in front of the office as much as the director; the loud speaker was finally taken away, the musical concert ended.

A Strike Committee was set up, representing the elected delegates of the guard posts. The workers set these posts up spontaneously, using lumber to build watch towers for the monitors behind the walls of the factory. The first night the workers slept in refrigerator packing crates. Several days later, after Séguy's condemnation of acts of sequestration, the sequestering of the boss posed problems for the CGT unionists. The CFDT was in favor of releasing Duvochel (the boss) in exchange for posting a bond. The FO faction was for continuing the sequestration. The majority of the workers opposed Duvochel's liberation, which threatened to demobilize a good number of them. A representative of the CGT leadership, Desaigne, arrived from Paris during the night. This speed of movement astonished the workers. Desaigne asked them with pride:

"Guess how I came?"

The workers replied: "By bicycle?"

"No," replied Desaigne.

"By car?"

"No."

"By train?"

"No, by plane," replied Desaigne proudly, to the astonishment of most of the guard post.

At the inter-union council the next day Desaigne took the floor, explaining that he came on his own initiative against the judgment of the Confederation, and requested the liberation of Duvochel. The Strike Committee took this intervention very badly; a CGT delegate even retorted that the problem of Duvochel's sequestration could not be posed by an outsider. Furious, Desaigne finally left and took the plane directly for Paris. The next day there was a vote for or against Duvochel's sequestration; the director's release was decided by 66.7 percent of those voting.

Several days later the strikers perfected a system of internal organization within the company to maintain the occupation. A daily canteen

was set up with donated labor. Permanent night shelters were installed everywhere in the factory. Entertainment was organized and there was a carnival for the benefit of the Strike Committee on Sunday.

This type of factory occupation is unprecedented in the history of Sud-Aviation although there had been lock-outs several times at the factory: in 1957, when it was occupied by the police; in 1960 another lock-out lasted two weeks after a wage strike, and in 1962 as well.

With its 2800 workers the Sud-Aviation factory is one of the biggest companies of the region.

THE BEGINNINGS OF DIRECT MANAGEMENT OF THE FACTORIES

The deepest phenomena of these last weeks have undoubtedly passed unseen. Excitement or anxiety focused everyone's attention on the spectacular aspects to the detriment of more important changes. However, several newspapers briefly mentioned cases in which workers called into question the organization of their labor, for example: work pace, safety on the job, productivity. Workers began to envisage making changes on their own initiative at Péchiney, Donges, the C.S.F. in Brest, etc. Unfortunately, the news did not say much about these experiments.

It is essential now to reflect on the embryos of self-management developed by the workers in certain factories because they represent a higher level of consciousness as compared with traditional wage demands. No doubt one of the characteristics of the May days was the hesitation and ambiguity surrounding the choice of a central terrain of struggle: the CGT always tried to keep the struggle at the level of strictly quantitative improvements; the CFDT put forward the ideas of participation and co-management without transcending the mystifying ideal of Swedish socialism. On the other hand, the rank and file could be seen leaving the terrain chosen by the CGT, or giving a radical content to CGT slogans by putting into practice the idea of appropriation of the means of production by the workers.

UNION DEMANDS AND THE PROBLEM OF POWER

Recently some students have proclaimed themselves "the only revolutionaries" because they emphasized the refusal of the university hierarchy while, they would have us believe, the workers were ignoble

reformists whose struggle was limited to union demands. Coming from privileged groups, this pretension deserves only a smile. But by contrast with the opposite and even more dangerous view, the experience of 1936 allows us to answer no to the question, "Can the workers irreversibly improve their life conditions within the framework of the existing regime?" The need to challenge the bourgeoisie is clearly expressed in this slogan, written on the walls of Nantes:

"MASSIVE INCREASE IN WAGES WITHOUT A CHANGE
IN THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES =
INCREASE IN THE COST OF LIVING AND A RETURN TO
POVERTY SEVERAL MONTHS FROM NOW."

What interests us is the fact that this position was put into practice even if in too limited forms. Witness this leaflet of the Sailors' Strike Committee, which preceded a long list of material demands with four points that posed the question of power:

STRIKE COMMITTEE OF THE PORT OF NANTES: OFFICERS AND SAILORS

DEMANDS

As preconditions for all discussions:

- 1) Repeal of the antisocial Ordinances and the Decree of July 31, 1963, limiting the right to strike;
 - 2) Full payment for strike days;
 - 3) No disconnecting of salaries and official guarantees for the future.
- Recognition of union freedoms within the company.
 - Increased power and legal immunity for the Delegate.
 - Creation of a Company Committee within the Autonomous Port.
 - Paritary management of the Company by the Delegates to the Company Committee, while awaiting the democratic nationalization of the Merchant Marine.
 - Granting real powers to the Company Committees and a large increase in their budgets, 5 percent minimum.
 - Return to the 40 hour work week without lower wages.
 - Equal vacation and food bonuses for officers and sailors.

—Granting the 13th month on a fixed date.
—Etc. . . .

And there were not just leaflets. . . .

CHALLENGING THE MANAGERIAL HIERARCHY

The imprisonment of directors was the first symptom. Duvochel, the boss at Sud-Aviation, was locked up for several days until he got his freedom from that other boss, Séguy, despite the will of the workers.

The CGT delegate Andrieu told how sailors in the Merchant Marine rebelled for the first time against their commander. He was denounced and insulted because of his bad habit of spying on the private life of his men. Everything began with this act of disrespect. On another boat, a fake vote had been organized with the help of illiterate blacks to force a return to work. Immediately, thirty activists intervened and the subordinates put their chief in his place. A last example: this leaflet published by the Loire-Atlantique Social Security workers at the end of May demanding the repeal of the Ordinances:

In order to reach this goal as soon as possible, the departmental CGT and CFDT have agreed with their Confederations to immediately set up Provisional Management Committees composed entirely of wage earners in the department's various Social Security and Family Subsidy Funds.

These Committees are substituting themselves on their own initiative for the Councils set up by the Government in the framework of the Ordinances.

They are working rapidly to take the measures necessary to assure the election of Administrators from among the wage earning population, which is the only group qualified to manage funds belonging to the workers.

Management changed still more profoundly at the E.D.F. (Electricity of France) thermic center in Cheviré. Sunday, June 2, the day when I talked with the workers and technicians of this factory, they had just received an average raise of 15,000 old francs a month and . . . they continued the strike! This was because, as one of them said: "The executives have not been here for two weeks and the plant still runs. We don't need them to provide current." This intervention led to a whole

discussion of the executive problem. They explained to me that in the Loire-Atlantique impressive numbers of executives were in solidarity with the workers, something never before seen. But support for wage demands was not the main point; the theme of management cemented the union. The executives were frustrated by the excessive centralization of public enterprises; they remain in their offices, signing papers, but they have no decision-making power.

Whether or not executives participated, what kind of self-management resulted?

THE FUNCTIONING OF DIRECT MANAGEMENT

We found the first stage in the organization of the factory occupations. Here, for example, is the communiqué of the Central Strike Committee concerning the A.C.B. ship yards:

On the third day of the occupation, the Central Committee was satisfied to observe the will to struggle of the whole A.C.B. personnel. No problems in the organization of rounds and rotations have been brought to the attention of the Committee. All shops, all offices are now well organized; this is worthy of note. When workers run things, they know how to get organized. Pay was distributed normally Wednesday at 4:00 P.M. Some comrades have not yet picked up their envelopes; to do so they should contact the Central Committee (tel. 322).

Canned goods were distributed after wages, and we take note of the personnel's self-discipline because all the orders were for less than 30 Francs, as requested.

The last two paragraphs give interesting hints about food supplies and the way in which accounts were settled among the workers themselves. Similarly, the strikers in the merchant marine requisitioned all the goods stored on the boats. This had never happened in earlier strikes, and this time too the ship owners tried to prevent the store rooms from being opened, but they had to yield in the face of threats to pry off the doors and locks.

Self-management was a necessity for the workers in the case of the Cheviré factory. When, on Saturday, May 18, the 293 agents occupied the place, they chose a strike committee composed of delegates from each union (90 percent of the workers at the E.D.F. are unionized).

While cutting back the current (which contributed to paralyzing local industries), they had to maintain a minimum of electricity to assure vital services: hospitals, etc. The Strike Committee therefore asked the strikers to "accept their responsibilities" in this domain. At the time of my investigation, the elected Committee had been the only source of authority in the plant for two weeks. The Committee saw to it that workers were there around the clock. It organized the continued supply of natural gas. It put order into the active but somewhat confused solidarity with which the surrounding population distributed food to the strikers.

The activists with whom I talked were very conscious (even the CGT delegate!) of the political meaning of this experiment, and one of them explained: "We wanted to show our ability and thus our right as producers to manage the means of production which we use. We've shown it can be done!"

If May 1968 was truly a "peaceful 1905" as Andrieu says, the 1917 to come will have to draw the logical consequences of these managerial conquests: power to the worker.⁴⁰

FROM ROADBLOCKS TO SELF-DEFENSE

Nantes: May 24–May 31.

In the second half of the month of May official politicians and "leftists" debated whether the French situation was revolutionary or not. The debate is obviously much clearer in Nantes, where the state of the struggle is such that no one can avoid taking a stand. Here is a concrete example from a leaflet signed UNEF-Transportation FO, distributed on May 30:

CRS AGAINST ROADBLOCKS

On May 29, around 5 P.M., the Transportation FO and students organized a roadblock at the entrance of Sorinières. About

40. The reference here is to the two Russian Revolutions, the smaller and inconclusive one of 1905 foreshadowing the decisive events of 1917 that led to the establishment of a communist government.

50 oil drums were set up in the middle of the road by about 100 FO teamsters, helped by students.

In agreement with the Central Strike Committee, only private cars and trucks containing perishable goods with a pass from the Central Strike Committee were allowed through.

Then around 10 P.M., four busloads of Mobile Guards arrived from Nantes with six motorcycle policemen, not to mention the accompanying police cars. After calling the leader of the roadblock, the chief of the forces of law and "order" ordered the attack, without warning.

There were several wounded, among them one high school student who was severely injured.

Those who wrote the leaflet and those who read it all agreed on the following facts: there is a Central Strike Committee; this Committee is in power; it decides on the right to travel on the roads; when private parties want to speak to someone in authority, they do not go to the Mayor or the Prefect but to the Central Committee. If this is not a revolutionary situation, when is there a revolution? Or do words no longer have any meaning?

Anyway, when the teamsters went on strike in Nantes, they did not ask subtle questions about revolution but they did see clearly that they had to control the communication of Nantes with the outside world. This was the only solution.

The roadblocks around Nantes were set up on Friday, May 24. The striking teamsters sealed off the main thoroughfares with the help of reinforcements of high school and college students. After May 26, the FO union—which dominates transportation in Nantes—acted in accord with the Central Strike Committee that had just been formed. The Central Strike Committee was already distributing gas rations; in addition, it was responsible for delivering permits to truckers to let only those goods through that were needed by the farmers or to supply the strikers with food. It was a good idea, but unfortunately confusion reigned at first due to a lack of organization. The Central Strike Committee distributed the permits badly because it had no competent "transportation" commission. No one wrote on the pass the number of the truck and the nature of freight (whether it was urgent or non-urgent merchandise). At first many truckers did not know that they needed a permit. The chief of the main "sweat shop" Grangjuoan, obtained a permit because the Central Strike Committee had not contacted the truckers! Etc. . . . In spite of this, the roads were controlled. The four main accesses were watched by pickets

of 500 truckers and students. Those who tried to run the blockade suffered a few broken windows and flat tires, but there was no looting: on Saturday, June 1, an FO communiqué denied rumors concerning the ransoming of private cars. The cops did not dare to disperse their forces to attack. The city authorities became more or less complicit with the organization that had been established.

And so, for several days, a whole town was isolated, the blockades functioning as filters. They even prepared for armed resistance in case the meager police forces that were still at the disposal of the Prefect tried to intervene. However, from May 31 on the situation changed. The awakening of the Gaullist state made the threat of police repression real. The Pentecostal holidays had a demobilizing influence and the probable return to work in a few factories forced the unions to reinforce their picket lines, which reduced their strength on the roadblocks.

And finally, from fear of motorists' discontent, the Central Strike Committee decided on June 1 to abandon the system of gas rationing (which required a whole administration of 40 people). Under those circumstances, the roadblocks could no longer be held; they were dismantled the night of June 1. The battlefield had to be changed to avoid bloodshed.

As an FO delegate told me on June 2, "if Paris starts up again on Tuesday, escorted convoys of trucks will arrive en masse on June 4. No question of holding the roads! But if our picket lines in the factories prevent the trucks from being unloaded the struggle will continue."

Nantes will thus have lived for a week in a situation of semi-self-defense, which did not take a violent form only because public authority was dismantled.

FROM SELF-ORGANIZATION TO SELF-MANAGEMENT

Just as during the Commune of Paris, the city of Nantes organized itself without having recourse to the intermediary bodies of the State.⁴¹ From the first days of the strike on, the withering away of the State was

41. The Commune of Paris in 1871 abolished the city government and established a new type of governing body that combined legislative and executive functions. Representatives were responsible for carrying out the measures they passed. They could be recalled at any time. This model inspired later libertarian Marxist and anarchist thinking on the "withering away of the state."

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realized in reality. To confront the situation, worker and peasant unions took control of the city's destiny.

This exemplary action has shown the masses of the people one of the most important things of all, namely that they have the capacity for self-organization. One element of socialism was concretely realized in the Nantes area, going far beyond the democratic reforms supported by the political parties. The Central Strike Committee, which brought together farmer and worker unions, moved into City Hall on Sunday, May 27. The Prefect had only a bailiff at his disposal.

I. Birth of the New Power: From Neighborhood Committees to the Central Strike Committee

Everything started in the Batignolles at the end of the second week of the strike (May 24). This is a 95 percent working class neighborhood of Nantes. The wives of the strikers there, mobilized by their family associations, decided to organize food distribution. Going through the neighborhood with a loudspeaker, the strikers' wives called the population to a meeting.

This first meeting was very enthusiastic and very militant; everyone was conscious of the political nature of the intended action. After the meeting, a delegation of about 100 strikers' wives went to the nearest factory to contact the Strike Committees.

A food supply committee was created, bringing together the three workers' family associations. This committee opened direct contacts with the farmers' unions of the nearest village: La Chapelle-sur-Erdre. A meeting of 15 unionized farmers and a delegation of workers and students decided to set up a permanent liaison to organize a distribution network without middlemen.

Simultaneously, on May 26, the unions discussed the establishment of a Central Strike Committee. This initiative had been demanded for a week by the U.O.FO of the Loire-Atlantique, which espoused revolutionary politics in opposition to the FO National Confederation.

This choice forced the unions to decide between blocking production completely or the use of the means of production by the producers in order to begin to create an autonomous people's power. The Central Strike Committee was composed of seven unions: the three workers' unions, the two farmers' unions (ENSEA, CNSA) and the two university unions (FEN, UNEF). There were two delegates from each union.



It took a long time for the Departmental Assemblies of the unions to accept this concept of organic unity, but it was the beginning of an independent workers' power. The Central Strike Committee had the same idea of organizing food distribution as the Neighborhood Committees, and in fact the activities of these two organizations overlapped. The Central Strike Committee, suspicious of the Neighborhood Committees, reproached them with having bypassed it in the beginning. In fact, the Neighborhood Committees turned out to be much more effective at organizing food distribution, and their action went much deeper than that of the unions. Starting with the creation of a direct market, they became cells of politicization in working class neighborhoods.

The Batignolles Committee put up four informational posters in the neighborhoods. One of those posters was proof of the degree of politicization of these neighborhood committees; it contained the following slogan: "Massive increase in wages without a change in the economic and political structures = increase in the cost of living and a return to poverty several months from now."

II. The Organization of Food Supplies by the Strikers

Meanwhile, the Central Strike Committee coordinated the organization of the various food supplies. The occupied Chamber of Agriculture maintained the liaison between the Neighborhood Committees and the Central Strike Committee. The Neighborhood Committees spread like wild-fire throughout the working class neighborhoods. On Wednesday, May 29, the Central Strike Committee opened six stores in the schools. On May 23, the farmers' unions issued an appeal for worker-farmer solidarity to organize food distribution concretely. Worker-student teams were created to help the farmers and they hoed potatoes and dug up the new potatoes.

Regular transportation was assured at first through the use of small trucks in the beginning and later with municipal buses.

Prices were equivalent to cost, a liter of milk going from 80 to 50 centimes, a kilo of potatoes from 70 to 12 centimes, carrots from 80 to 50 centimes. The big shop owners had to close down. Every morning union members checked the prices on the markets. They called out with the loudspeaker: "Shopkeepers, stay honest." Armed with a list of minimum and maximum prices, flying teams spread over the markets. Explanations were demanded of those who exceeded the maximum. Posters were issued to grocery stores that were allowed to open, with the follow-

ing message: "Out of concern for the population's food supply, the unions allow this small shop to open its doors on the condition that it respects normal prices."

The farmers gave two and a half million [old] francs, which was kept in reserve in order to assure later survival. Many gifts in kind were added to that.

The workers left the electric current on, specifically to keep the dairies in operation. The fuel and gas needed by the farmers was delivered normally. Strikers delivered industrial food for cattle to the farmers.

In each of these actions, worker-farmer mutual aid was realized concretely with a clear consciousness of its political character. The transformation of agricultural techniques and the proletarianization of the farmers had created a new class of farmers in the younger generation who linked their destiny directly with that of the working class. The farm leader, Bernard Lambert, was the best representative of this new revolutionary consciousness among farmers.

III. The Generalization of Direct Management

On the other hand, the Central Strike Committee had also taken over the distribution of gas in agreement with the Oil Tankers' Strike Committee; rations were issued by the unions to the Health Services and the food distributors. This decision in no way called into question the strike action in the sectors concerned; it was limited to the organization of priority services under union control, which reinforced the power of the union in the city.

Unionized teachers and camp leaders organized nurseries for the strikers' children. The educational institutions' Strike Committees accepted responsibility for taking in the children and so avoided the collapse of the teachers' strike movements. At the same time, child care was organized in the universities.

Finally, the union organizations distributed food rations to the families of those strikers in the worst financial situation. These rations were the equivalent of a certain amount of food. For each child under three years of age, a ration of one franc for milk, and for each person older than three years, a ration of 500 grams of bread and a ration of one franc worth of food staples.

The small shopkeepers' unions and the pharmacists' unions collected the rations, which were payable at the cashier of the social aid

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bureau. The shopkeepers were asked to honor the rations out of solidarity with the strikers' families.

This direct organization by the new power implied the existence of a united political front between farmers, the working class, students and the middle classes. This united front was realized in Nantes and that is what made it possible to go on to the second level of the struggle: the creation of an autonomous workers' power in the face of the disintegration of the power of the ruling class.

Nantes was a unique, concrete example which demonstrated the possibility of a workers' government founded on direct management of the economy by the producers.

This testimony has drawn lessons directly from the May Events: if the unions and the workers' political parties had exploited the possibilities of the social movement, this second stage in the struggle could have been reached not only in Nantes, which is now just an example, but in every industrial city in France.