

A CRITIQUE

The following article by Claude Prevost was published, in La Nouvelle Critique, a theoretical journal of the French Communist Party,, in June 1968. This article is one of the most intelligent critiques of student ideology produced by the Party in the period of the Events. Its relatively mild and reasonable tone should not make one forget the violent and, often dishonest polemics still resounding in the background.: it is an expression of their theoretical basis.

This article seemed important enough to translate and, publish because it would have been too easy to present only the students' side of the argument. The Communists, like many Old Leftists in the United States, were appalled by the "nihilism" they believed they could detect in the student movement. Forced to confront the views of their adversaries, they not only refuted some of the sillier ideas of the students, but revealed much about themselves.

For example: the extraordinary (for a "communist") distaste for revolutionary violence; the characterization of the relative passivity of the French proletariat in the years preceding May as "responsible" and "mature" (Lenin would not have been so sanguine); the insistence that global opposition to the society is mere silliness; the demand for a "rational" strategy which the Party can guide every step of the way without risk of surprises, even pleasant ones; the insistence on explaining the student movement in traditional terms, as petty bourgeois leftism, a point of view which reveals a great reluctance to confront a new phenomenon with new ideas; the "magnanimous" desire to co-opt and integrate the student movement into a presumably more "sensible" opposition; and so on.

Let Prevost's article cannot be dismissed as a mere example of the conservatism of the Party. It is sometimes right, especially when it criticizes "student folklore", the wild and Utopian spirit of the movement which was not always in touch with certain important realities. Thus Prevost is right to reject the fetishization of violence, the contempt for workers' demands, the total hostility to all organization, etc. Yet these were not essential aspects of the movement. The students themselves became increasingly uncomfortable with precisely these sorts of things as the Events progressed. A critique of "student folklore" spontaneously arose within the movement as students sought realistic, if revolutionary, solutions to their problems.

Hence Prevost's article, it must be admitted, does not go to the heart of the question, even if it brings certain aspects of it clearly to the fore by its very unilaterality. But the movement would not have been deeply touched by this attack, since it developed, its own self-critique and a political strategy which Prevost seems not to have understood at all. For more on the latter, see the section "Struggles" below.

DOCUMENT

THE FOUNDATIONS OF LEFTIST IDEOLOGY

by

Claude Prevost (From La Nouvelle Critique no. 15, June 1968)

The student movement is rich and varied. It has moved quickly to the center of the stage, to the surprise of many. So far the tumult and confusion have scarcely permitted us to distinguish its main lines of ideological force. It is true that it is not a homogeneous milieu and that it is being differentiated with increasing speed. In particular, those students who are organically closest to the real working class vanguard have proposed solutions which are gradually making progress. But not without difficulties, because they come up against the resistance and the inertia of an ideology which still occludes the true perspectives of struggle. It must be recognized that leftism still dominates the ideological themes which are most successful among students. It is the movement as a whole which spontaneously secretes this ideology while, on the other hand, quadra - or sexagenerian ideologists concern themselves with constantly reinjecting it and in massive doses. Here we find a phenomenon which should neither astonish nor exasperate, but which must first be recognized in order the better to be known. Understanding of this ideology will not supply a magic acid capable of dissolving it in the wink of an eye, but it can help some of those who are its bearers at least to sense what it is, therefore to begin to take their distance from it.

The statements and especially the behavior of those who bear this dominant ideology may be contradictory. But what is essential is that it presents itself as a coherent totality: this is one of the reasons for its success, and not the least of them. It is for the sake of convenience that we will extract certain of its themes, but this work of abstraction should not make us forget how thoroughly interconnected, closely intertwined and, on first sight, indiscernible these themes are.

THE FESTIVE HORIZON

The first theme, that which is the most obvious theme or if one will guiding-image, is that of creative violence. We cannot be indifferent when so many young demonstrators sing the International, even if to do so, as a witness has written, some read the text from a page.

But neither should we fool ourselves; it is appropriate to look at the meaning which they themselves give to this act: "Singing the International," says a student in Letters, "was in any case much more the sign of a revolt, it was more a hymn against than, properly speaking, a communist hymn. Everyone knew this song, the song of revolt."

At the price of a typical regression, revolution falls back into revolt and, in the final analysis, when they mention the wretched of the earth, they think more of Frantz Fanon than of Eugene Pottier and Degeyter. Revolt is pure violence and violence is the motor of all action. This is unhesitatingly recognized by the very ones who multiply occasions for the ultra-violent to express themselves: "It was furthermore in the logic of Daniel Cohn-Bendit's friends to provoke disorder and invite confrontation."

One could approve this logic or not, but it had to be recognized since the leaders themselves told us they regretted the passivity of the police, a passivity which, said they "anaesthetized their action and isolated it." (Jean Daniel, Le Nouvel Observateur, May 8); or again: "The 'enrages' of Nanterre obtained the confrontation which they had long hoped for." (Rene Backmann, Ibid.) But there is no gap in this logic since violence reveals the movement to itself. One can summarize a favorite thesis of the 22nd of March Movement by parodying a famous

slogan: without revolutionary violence, no revolutionary movement. Whether it is really a question of revolution is quite another matter, but the fact is that they recognize a "revolutionary" dignity in the working class only to the extent that it engages in violent actions.

To tell the truth, what violence reveals to itself is less a collectivity than a juxtaposition of individuals. Speaking of the preparation of the barricades on the night of the 10th to the 11th of May, Cohn-Bendit remarked: "It was something of a festival..." It is perhaps startling, but an analogous formula can be found in the obviously sincere testimony of a philosophy student who quotes Georges Bataille (perhaps inappropriately!) writing of the same episode: "The tragic is the horizon of the festival."

Violence is joy. Several witnesses describe the explosion in terms which they would have used to describe an orgasm. Violence is fecund because in it desires are incarnated, desires for change, desires for something merely "different," Desire in short. A commentator noted this clearly. He is Edgar Morin in a series of articles published in Le Monde. His statement of the case is doubly revealing because it is wholly caught up in the ideology which it transcribes. Morin's discourse unconsciously doubles it, exaggerating it, caricaturing it in his very metaphors: student maelstrom/ unfurling of a great rebellion/ chain reaction/ prodigious commune/ prodigious week/ planetary emanations/ internationalist emanations/ ecstasy of history/ osmosis takes place/ the baptism of billy clubs/ the joyous springing up of barricades... In fact, Morin is incapable of describing the student movement because he is unable to think it.

But perhaps it is impossible to give anything more than a series of poetic equivalents? This is what another witness, a philosopher as well, would like to suggest: To explain is also to co-opt: but Friday night is unco-optable by anyone, by anything. In the first place no one has the concepts required to think it at hand; then too, if you have witnessed this insurrection, you want to show a sort of fidelity to the students by refusing to think what took place using already constituted categories." (Les Lettres Franchises, "Student Special.") This invitation is perplexing. Marx did not have to give up thinking about the Paris Commune which, one readily admits, went somewhat beyond the events of the Rue Gay-Lussac in size and complexity. Is it that just as for Kant the beautiful is without concepts, so too violence cannot be thought? One of Morin's formulas offers us an answer: all that mutually engenders itself. Violence is life, its oceanic deployment which no logic can encompass. Curiously, the cult of spontaneity, against which Lenin polemicized with well-known vigor, shows up here in conjunction with neo-Sorelian and neo-Bergsonian themes.

A DRAMATIC HIATUS

Bergson defined the comic as "the mechanical laid over the living." It was perhaps by virtue of a metempsychosis of ideas that M. Cohn-Bendit qualified working class demands as laughable ... In the face of this multiform life, society, with all its "integration", represents a "soulless" mechanism. Morin evokes "the disaster of techno-bureaucratic life in work." Work is necessarily "alienating". What the students refuse is "modern" society, never defined by the nature of the dominant relations of production, but by marginal, secondary adjectives.

Obviously the overworked theme of "consumer society" had to come up here as well as the other associated themes of "industrial society", of "alienation" e tutti quanti. As Louis Althusser says in an interview in L'Unita (La Pensée, no. 138): these are "bourgeois ideological notions ..., anti-scientific, anti-Marxist, designed for the struggle against revolutionaries". It is not surprising to hear the same cord struck by His Eminence Mgr. Marty, during his Ascension homily, consumer society meaning materialistic society, in the East as in the West. After

all, in his presentation of Marcuse's philosophy, Serge Mallet traces back to the era of the first five year plans the misdeeds of industrial society in the U.S.S.R. which "disgusted" Marcuse with Marxist socialism: "Already the cement flows of Dnieprostroi suffocated the liberetarian aspirations of the young Soviet republic". Happy Czarist Russia, where candles gave light...

A strange consensus forms around this theme. Some denounce "the factitious harmony of a consumer society where a presumed abundance of goods contradicts and ignores the exigencies of life, this suffocation of being in the prison of having". Others believe they can discover that "solidarity with Vietnam goes along with the refusal of consumer society, of which American capitalism offers the most perfected model and which the Vietnamese have forced to the negotiating table". "Consumer" or "industrial" society: sometimes the qualification disappears altogether and this society is no longer even precisely named. It is characterized as a "carnivorous flower", one declares oneself "against the police, against order, against society" and agrees that the movement has something "anti-social" about it. Sometimes too, there are so many adjectives that the mass drowns the meaning and the object of global distaste becomes every society, Society, "technical-bourgeois-managerial-industrial-consuming, leisure civilization", in short everything, except capitalist society... But the coherence of all this is obvious, as is what nourishes anarchic protest.

Marx said that capitalism engenders its own grave-diggers. He could not - for good reason - have read Marcuse or the small fry, because then he would have known that the grave-diggers could join the C.G.T., have children, buy refrigerators, thereby allowing themselves to be "integrated", or as Sartre nicely puts it, to become an "institution". The revolt "globally contests" the whole of "consumer society", including the consuming proletariat (the fact that there cannot be consumption without production has been a bit neglected, but it is odd, that in all this verbal deluge the producers would be sought in vain),

The working class possesses some innate virtues, a little like the blue blood of the aristocracy, but these congenital qualities are debased as quickly as, for Peguy, the mystical passes into the political: the workers' hair rapidly turns grey and they organize: "The worker who is head of a family", says Cohn-Bendit, "does not want to fight when he sees that the C.G.T. applies the brakes, that the others do not move. But the young workers, they have nothing to lose: they are unemployed, they have no family, no installments to pay on the refrigerator". These few lines are interesting: some traces of Marxist vocabulary appear in them (the workers had nothing to lose but their chains, they have their motor-bike and their electric razor to lose in 1968); but what is especially clear here is the blinding ignorance of the real working class. A tragic ignorance.

The opposition - students-institutions - is reflected in other antithetical couples: Youth-Age, Freedom-Authority. But among the institutions, there are the parties and the union organizations: it is they which are the opium of the people; the "leaderships", the political "apparatuses" are the warders who prevent "the full flowering of life", who emprison the "living forces of contestation" "in the parliaments, the sections, the cells" (Jean Daniel). Others employ metaphors which place on the same level "the disciplinary regime of the factory", "the school-barracks" and the "Stalinistic apparatus", the C.G.T. which commands the working class and even "locks it up".

Rising aspirations focus from all sides on the working class, but this elan is addressed to a mythical, prehistorical working class, to workers such as one finds in Hugo's novels, isolated, ferociously rebellious workers, to a sort of "noble savage" who refuses organization, and not to the "conformist" who continues to insure vital services instead of "globally contesting" everything. There is a dramatic hiatus here between desire and reality. There are still many students searching for a working class which can reflect back to them the image of their student condition, and not finding it, they accuse the "apparatuses" of denaturing their dream. Having believed for years what

they were told by bourgeois ideologists, namely that the workers slumbered, this student fraction does not recognize these guys, obviously risen long before them and with faces that bear no trace of the nocturnal vapors; and then they resort to magic to explain this "transformation".

NEITHER STRATEGY NOR PROGRAM

But this working class is the masses. Precisely how can this "mass rising" be explained? Once again, this was a difficult phenomenon to think through with the categories which the majority of students had at their disposal up to then: "inertia", "apathy", "sinking into comfort". It is necessary to produce "new" concepts, or rather complements to the preceding ones. But here again one finds an old ideology, with its source in the prehistory of the working class movement, that of active minorities, a mechanistic caricature of the dialectical relations of the mass of troops to the vanguard: to situate each of these notions in relation to the other it is necessary to have some clear ideas about strategy. But here we must admit there is a yawning gap among the majority of students.

Cohn-Bendit confesses on the 15th of May that he is borne along by events which he does not control. His statement deserves to be quoted at some length: "What happened Friday, what was happening all during the week, was not foreseen by us, much less premeditated, because we had not imagined that the government would involve itself in such stupid provocations". "We ourselves were surprised by the incredible stupidity of the authorities. We had not foreseen any test of strength in the Spring ... The crisis took place earlier because the government itself started it. And once the escalation had begun, we were obliged to follow". "We thought that this objective situation would exist at the beginning of next semester. The stupidity of the government created it in the month of May: we had nothing to do with it." The passages in italics add up to an extraordinary sum of confessions: continual underestimation of the Gaullist government, small knowledge of the very milieu in which one acts, tardiness with respect to events, etc. Certainly no revolutionary ever pretended to foresee in all its anecdotal details the unfolding of the "operations" he leads; but what is striking here is the fact that the pseudo-vanguard is towed along by events and that they take on the tonality and the orientation given them by the repressive government. It is sufficient to reread in Lenin's works the writings on the period of 1917 to measure all that separates a Marxist-Leninist from a petty bourgeois anarchist.

CONTESTATION

Without strategy, the movement left to itself has no precise program. There are some who take this as a reason to condescend to those who have the one and the other and to affirm that the French Communist Party sanctions "only vague reforms" and calls for "no action". But what then is the content of the "action" called for by the anarchists? Sartre went to the Sorbonne to say it: "Cohn-Bendit keeps the movement on the true level of contestation where it should remain". Sartre must be granted a constant virtue: he understands the timely co-optation of stylish words and knows how to give them at least an appearance of theoretical dignity.

Contestation is at present one of the most used words in France. The attempt to dig a bit deeper into the meaning of this concept comes up against a refusal. In Le Monde of May 10, several writers and philosophers published an interesting text which, after giving "consumer society" its inevitable knocks ("the so-called society of abundance, perfectly exemplified by the French world") tries to see in the student movement "the will to escape, by every means, from an alienated order, an order so highly structured and integrated that simple contestation always risks being placed in its service" and hopes that this movement can "oppose and maintain a power of refusal capable ... of opening a future". It is clear from reading this text why the verb to contest is, almost always at this time, an intransitive verb:

when by chance it is given an object, this latter remains ill defined; it is, at best, "the system as a whole".

In reality, this concept of contestation was brought in to fill a gaping theoretical and political void in student "consciousness". The same philosophy student says it in a striking phrase: "A revolutionary signifier, still mute, has just erupted in our space". What is a "mute signifier"? No doubt an alogical monster, a signifier without signification. It cannot be better put: this contestation usually risks having no content. Jean Bruhat put it excellently in Les Lettres Franchises: this global refusal points toward no solution, it manifests a resurgence of anarcho-syndicalism and sends us back once more to the prehistory of the working class movement. As for the modern working class, it does not contest, it demands, and it is enough to examine the program of the C.G.T. to observe that it always employs this latter verb transitively.

In the final analysis, the movement threatens to give out on a university Utopia. Thus the Movement of March 22 talks about transforming the University into a bastion. Whether an internal reform of the University, without any reference to the "rest" of society seems satisfactory, or whether the idea is later to project onto the "outside" the "revolution" made "within", the approach remains impregnated with an idealism which Jean Bruhat's good sense has once more quickly brought to light.

This is because at the basis of this ideology, at the level of its most secret infra-structure, there lies the project of "changing man" and of changing him first. A document published at Nanterre over a month ago by the Movement of 22 March emphasized these old libertarian aspirations for the total expression of the self. It was a case of Stirner, but reviewed and corrected by an imaginary Chomsky, who was made to say that language was pure "creativity": so this document stigmatized the repressive activity of grandmothers who traumatised the grandchildren in their care by teaching them to speak "correctly". That Chomsky never spoke of creativity without rules ("creativity which changes the rules" and "creativity governed by the rules") and that in fact grandmothers are unwittingly, more Chomskyan than the men of the "March 22" is, after all, a small detail which should not stop the Revolution ... But, once again, the shadow of the Total Man reappears here.

TO REDISCOVER THE REAL RELATIONS

All these ideological themes form a coherent totality, as we have already noted. It will be objected that they are explicitly formulated by only a small number of students or ideologues. How then can the undeniable success of this ideology be explained? In For Marx, Althusser underlines an important aspect of the Marxist definition of ideology: "Ideology is indeed a system of representations; but usually these representations have nothing to do with "consciousness": they are usually images, sometimes concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose themselves on the immense majority of men without passing through their "consciousness". They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects, and act functionally on men by a process which escapes them". The success of anarcho-syndicalist ideology among the students is explained in particular by the lived resonances which its principal themes evoke or encounter among them.

Presenting Marcuse's work (which is still little known in France since his most "explicit" work, One-Dimensional Man has just come out), Serge Mallet writes: "There is nothing astonishing about the fact that adolescents 'to whom all hope has been refused', recognize themselves in many Marcusean themes: social repression; the profoundly totalitarian character of society; mutilation and leveling of consciousness; regimentation of energies, which are forbidden all transcendence toward a different future in the profit of a productive system both rationalized in the extreme and totally irrational in its waste, its destruction of wealth, its absence of human goals; the evident failure, finally of the working

class movement and the appeal to the forces of 'intellectual subversion' as a last barrier against rising barbarism and a last reservoir of revolutionary energy". Such a description remains at the level of the lived experience which it pretends to explain; it does not allow a knowledge of the ideology which it describes as ideology; it remains itself ideological. To "explain" an ideology one must leap and cross a space, scrape off the imaginary relations to find the real relations. Let us sketch this work, very briefly.

THE PROFESSOR OR THE SYSTEM

The active student strata have only a minimal political experience, These young bourgeois and petty bourgeois masses achieved political intelligence after the end of the Algerian war, in the heart of a Gaullist regime which actively worked toward the depolitization of the middle strata, for lack of the power to impose it on the working class. Sometimes astonishment is expressed at finding among so many of them the very same contempt of parliament and the parties, of democracy as among avowed Gaullists: this is to forget that it was the dominant ideology! In this political void, which even the most active communist organization could not have filled, the theme of "spontaneity" proliferates quite naturally. Anarcho-syndicalism is a symptom of the youth of the movement, its almost inevitable ransom, with the taste for violent confrontation and the contempt for organization which have always characterized it.

Deprived of all perspectives of struggle for so long, the mass of students found itself in the very state of apathy which it believed it could detect in the working class. Gaullism seemed to it to be as solid as a rock, "consumer society" established for all time, in short nothing was possible. Then perspectives appear, and from that moment on, in a sociologically typical turn-around, inertia gives way to wild impatience, the foolhardy underestimation of the enemy follows on the tenacious over-estimation of this very same adversary and it is suddenly announced, as by the "Pivertiste" of '36, that everything is possible. But what really produces these new perspectives remains, it should be noted, totality understood: a process which must undoubtedly be related to the stubborn struggle of the working class and to the progress toward political unity of the left "apparatuses". The apoliticism of former times and the present "overpolitization" have the same effect: they mask the real movement and, to employ one of these railroad metaphors so much in honor today, they hide the right train. *The students accused the communists of what in English would be called "jumping on the bandwagon". The word "train" occurs in the French expression. (translator's note).

This myopia and these "errors" are to be explained by the isolation of the mass of students. Gripped by a highly structured university organization the wheels of which they see but not the mainspring, they are in somewhat the same situation as Joseph K., caught up in a trial the meaning of which he does not grasp. Whence their limited horizon and the fact that, when the working class accelerates its movement so blatantly that even the most myopic eyes must be blinded by it, they project on it their own situation instead of seeing it for what it is, organized, powerful, resolute. Its calm is interpreted as reformism, its impressive organization as inhuman mechanism, its maturity as senility. Then, in the intoxication of recent self-discovery they long to tell these "paralytics" the secret of the movement, which they believe themselves to possess; they give lessons in tactics and strategy and are painfully astonished by the refusal they receive.

Students have felt themselves to be an active mass only briefly: this "new consciousness" is still marked by individualistic, even libertarian aspirations for a self-fulfillment with a strong religious tint in many cases. This fulfillment takes the modern path to the "salvation of the soul", that is to say, through "commitment": a lot of thought has been given lately to the (real) decline of Sartreism, without seeing that in the nearly total shipwreck of this nuance of

existentialism, this hulk had managed to float. The essential thing is not to commit oneself to do something, but to commit oneself, without qualification. But a large sum of individual "commitments" adds up in the end to a social phenomenon.

Ignorant of the causes of its distress, the energy of protest rushes easily toward the effects. In the time of *Germinal*, when they lacked bread, it happened that miners' wives killed bakers. Today it may happen that, even while giving themselves over to "global contestation", students will choose as their privileged target the present faculty, rather than really working to change the system which puts it in the position of teaching as it does, rather than demanding the funds needed by Higher Education to bring itself up to the level of the requirements of our century. It has been all too often true that teachers have been unable to satisfy the needs of a mass university and to face up to the necessities imposed by the scientific and technical revolution. But when they become the main target, those in power can rub their hands with glee. To establish student-faculty parity in the running of the university is a considerable advance and, we hope, an irreversible one (even though, as Maurice Duverger lucidly noted, one must watch out for a Thermidor), but the sometimes exclusive preoccupation with the "qualitative" demand risks leaving the paritary administrators with a limited power over restricted means. Left to itself, the student movement might very well let the prey escape for its shadow.

A GROUP APART

In reality, the search for a deep explanation collapses unless an attempt is made, with the existing categories of course, to find the theory of this movement and, to do so, to relate it to the new constellation of today's class struggle in France. One cannot act on ideology and transform it into an "instrument of reflected action on History" without taking one's distance from it.

M. Pompidou speaks willingly of a "transformation" occurring in France. We will concede that he is right: for many years now our country has been undergoing and still undergoes a deep transformation. We are passing from artisanal France to salaried France. In his article published in our 11th issue, under the title "Social Classes in Today's France", Serge Laurent described the "sociological" effects of this phenomenon. I refer the reader to it. I will however cite several observations which appear basic to me. In the first place, this one: "Tendency toward the internal differentiation of the basic classes, toward the development and the rapid transformation of the position of the middle strata and, in contradictory fashion, tendency toward a growing polarization of social relations". Next the tendency toward wage earning among the active population, the working class representing more than ever the largest group (43%), followed by other salaried workers (25.6%). In this group, there are the intellectuals, deeply affected by capillary attraction, by the student movement, which represents a small percentage but a numerically large and expanding contingent, taking into account the fact that there remain many non-salaried intellectuals. Among these latter, the students, an unstable group because perpetually in the process of changing, of abandoning their transitory condition, but steadily growing numerically, have now passed the half million mark, having multiplied their numbers several times over in a relatively short time.

For an in-depth analysis one can return to an old text by Maurice Thorez, "The Notion of Class and the Historical Role of the Working Class". There the situation of the intellectual class, and by refraction of the students, is defined. Maurice Thorez situates them generally in the middle strata but as a group apart in the midst of these "intermediate social strata". What is more the intellectuals, like the students, do not constitute a homogeneous stratum; they cannot, as such, play a directive role in political struggles; rather, their position reflects the general condition of the class struggle.

At the same time, they have "serious moral and ideological reasons for coming over to the democratic camp". These analyses are well known; they have been "put

into practice" by the entire Communist Party with undeniable success. It thus cannot be said of the communists that they are surprised by what is happening: they can republish without embarrassment old texts on the ever more important role of intellectuals in political struggles, on the growing participation of youth in these very same battles, on the necessary convergence of actions led by the different classes and social strata oppressed by State monopoly capitalism; they have only to remind people of their proposals on the democratization of the University to win a wide audience.

The student masses have thus entered the struggle and (naturally) with the forms which correspond to the level of political maturity which they have attained here and there. A heterogeneous social stratum, the students produce very differentiated, heterogeneous, even eccentric forms of action in which there is often a large share of adventurism. Those who lead the struggles of the working class would be crazy if they failed to take this into account and simply modeled their line on the fluctuations and the improvisations of student "strategy". The experience of these last few weeks shows that on this point too, they are worthy of confidence.

THE SAME ENEMY

By their ambiguous status in class society, the intellectuals -and still more the students with their doubly ambiguous status - are the stakes in a dispute between the two basic classes and are furthermore an ideologically vulnerable stratum, subject to multiple temptations, balancing between right and left opportunism, vulnerable to idealistic and individualistic illusions. For the intellectual "Ideas" seem easily animated with an absolutely autonomous force and, correlatively, it often seems to him that it suffices to wish to do. And to wish, either alone or organized in occasional and quickly dissolved collectivities. As Lenin clearly put it in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward*: "What generally characterizes intellectuals as a special stratum in contemporary capitalist societies, is what, among other things, disadvantageously distinguishes this social stratum from the proletariat".

We already thought as much: the ideology which speaks through the mouths to which we have patiently listened is petty bourgeois ideology, a variant, quite often, of bourgeois ideology itself. The same reproach does not apply equally to all these ideologues, some of whom seem to be the object of dubious manipulations: if future history should discover here and there among them some "Pope Gapon", I will be the last to be surprised.

But many of those who follow them are authentic, sincere revolutionaries - but petty bourgeois revolutionaries. I would hazard a hypothesis: in the beginning, a short while ago, these young men started out from democratic demands, such as paritary commissions, "the autonomy" of the University, etc., all measures which a bourgeois democracy can grant or rather concede, if the pressure is sufficient. But these aspirations came up against the latent, then unrestrained violence of the government of the monopolies. It was enough to make them despair of everything. Revolt brought on instant despair in capitalism, in every democratic society, even in society itself, and jumped vertiginous distances in one leap: they went over to revolutionary Utopia. In fact this leap is a backward one: Utopian socialism, or worse yet the vague fraternal reverie on "a more beautiful society", all that is far behind us, at least 100 years behind the vanguard of the working class. Modern revolution takes the route of enlarged democracy: this is a thesis familiar to French communists, to which they will stick.

But are these "young-old revolutionaries", these "archaic innovators", irremediably disqualified as revolutionaries? Certain of them, yes, without any doubt. The day after a drunk there are impressive "returns to the fold": the history of the years '30-'35 in Germany are unhappily abundant in examples of this type. But for many, it can turn out otherwise. It would be absurd to believe that this

depends entirely on us (because, how could a subjective will, even that of a highly "structured" collectivity* completely reorient an objective current?), but it depends also on us.

In 1936 the working class led a movement of historical significance to victory. Today, in conditions that are 100 times as difficult, it has taken on one of equal magnitude. In those days, the majority of students belonged to the Right Leagues. At present, 10 times more numerous, the students in their majority fight the same enemy as the working class. Many students do not know it; they struggle with desperation, as if they were alone and fall with an obstinacy worthy of a better fate into all the traps laid for them by a class the cunning and the resilience of which they have not yet understood. This "guerilla" struggle incommodes the working class, obliges it to cover itself on a flank which the naive may have hoped would be free from all threat -and the working class is right, there too, to strike its blows. It is in the very interest of the student movement as a whole: there where it is not relayed, shored up by an adult, organized, revolutionary working class, hence one disposing of a great communist party, in West Germany for example, the student movement is diluted, worn down, in spite of its internal cohesion and the vigor of its struggles, and for a year now has turned in circles, without prospects.

But the negative traits we have noted in the French student movement are not indelible, like an original sin. This compact ideology can be fissured: here and there cracks appear. This myopic protest can refine its vision. The students, in their mass, have risen against the Gaullist state, against capitalist society, against the class University. They feel, in their own way, the contradictions of a regime set on crushing the working class. These latter know it, know it often for them, and in its habitual manner, the working class will know how to be unitary for two, an attitude which does not exclude a certain harshness toward those who place this unity in jeopardy. Without the support of the intellectuals and the students, the working class would not perhaps sing the "funeral solos" of which Marx spoke, but it could not aspire to a decisive victory. It also knows how to be patient, knowing that the X's and the Y's pass, but that the students, or rather the intellectuals that they will soon become, remain. Today, the balance of forces having changed in the world, revolutionaries should certainly fight petty bourgeois revolutionism, but it is no longer necessary, as it was a hundred years ago and more, to crush it in order to build on its ruins; its elan, its generosity can be captured to the total profit of the two de facto allied strata; I would say, using a deliberately provocative expression, that it can and should be co-opted.