

[The book which is represented here by several chapters and posters will appear with the State University of New York Press in May 2001. Special thanks to Garrick Davis for help with the manuscript and for coming up with the (very poetic) title.]

WHEN POETRY RULED THE STREETS

The May Events of 1968

By Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman



GRAFFITI FROM THE WALLS OF PARIS: 1968

It is forbidden to forbid. Freedom begins by forbidding something: interference with the freedom of others.

Run comrade, the old world is behind you.

The Revolution must take place in men before occurring in things.

The walls have ears. Your ears have walls.

The act institutes the consciousness.

To desire reality is good! To realize one's desires is better.

The thought of tomorrow's enjoyment will never console me for today's boredom.

A single non-revolutionary weekend is infinitely bloodier than a month of permanent revolution.

Beneath the cobblestones is the beach.

We are all German Jews.

Be salted, not sugared.

I am in the service of no one, the people will serve themselves.

The barricade blocks the street but opens the way.

Art is dead, liberate our daily life.

Life is elsewhere.

The restraints imposed on pleasure excite the pleasure of living without restraints.

The more I make love, the more I want to make the Revolution, the more I make the Revolution, the more I want to make love.

All power to the imagination!

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Foreword

May '68 in France: Dynamics and Consequences

by Douglas Kellner

In the historical memory of the Left, the Events of May '68 in France have attained mythic proportion. The student uprising, workers' strikes and factory occupations that erupted during a brief but explosive period in 1968 instilled fear in the hearts of ruling powers everywhere. They inspired those in revolt everywhere with the faith that social upheaval is possible and that spontaneous insurgency can overcome the force of circumstances. For an all-too-brief moment, imagination seized power, the impossible was demanded, and poetry and spontaneity ruled the streets.

Of course, the revolutionary energies of the May Events were soon exhausted, order was restored, and since then the significance of May '68 has been passionately debated. Did the uprising reveal the exhaustion and bankruptcy of the existing political system and parties, or the immaturity and undisciplined anarchy of the forces in revolt? Did the Events indicate the possibility of fundamental change, or prove that the established system can absorb all forms of opposition and contestation? Did May '68 signal the autonomy of cultural and social revolution, or demonstrate once again that the old economic and political forces still control the system and can resist all change?

By now, a small library of books and articles have addressed the May Events and offered a myriad of conflicting interpretations. After a series of activities in 1998 commemorating the 30th anniversary of May '68 and as a new millennium dawns, the Events themselves are buried in the historical archives, shrouded in dim remembrance, and mystified by cliched media images and discourses. It is thus extremely useful to have access for the first time in English to many key original documents accompanied by a lucid and engaging record of the Events. Feenberg and Freedman have assembled a valuable collection of primary documents that provide a feeling for the immediacy and passion of the May Events, that disclose the explosion of radical thought it elicited, and that provide important evidence of the discourse and action of resistance in an advanced capitalist society. The documents reveal the self-understanding of the actual participants in the Events and allow them to speak directly to us, across the ages to a

different historical conjuncture.

Participants and firsthand observers of the Events, Feenberg and Freedman provide a lively account that allows today's readers to grasp the chronology and significance of the explosion in France and to experience the excitement and drama of what now appears as one of the most surprising and powerful contestations of the established political and economic system in the second half of the 20th century. Their narrative is engaging and spirited, capturing the novelty and intensity of the Events, their complexity and contradictions, and the genuine excitement of what now appears as the last major revolutionary uprising in the Western world.

Feenberg and Freedman also provide lucid interpretive perspectives to make sense of the Events of May '68, and to challenge the current and coming generations of students and workers to renew radical contestation in the struggle for social transformation. Their assembled documents and analyses suggest to us today that resistance and action is feasible, that students and intellectuals can be harbingers of social transformation and agents of effective action, and that an oppressive system can be challenged and changed.

Feenberg and Freedman present the May Events in the first instance as a revolt against a technocratic system and as evidence that contestation and alternatives to this system are viable. Their documents and analyses show that middle-class students, intellectuals, and artists can organize themselves to transform their immediate places of work and everyday life and can unite with workers to militate for fundamental social transformation.

May '68 demonstrates as well that spontaneous action can erupt quickly and surprisingly, that it can provide alternatives to standard politics, and that a new politics is practical and necessary. The initial inability of established Left political parties and unions to support the students and workers suggests the irrelevancy of politics as usual and the need to go outside of ordinary political channels and institutions to spark significant contestation and change. The Events also suggest the primacy of social and cultural revolution, of the need to change individuals, social relations, and culture as a prelude to political and systemic transformation. The total nature of the rebellion reflects the totalizing domination of the system which must itself be transformed if significant change is to take place.

Of course, the dispersion of revolutionary energy and aspirations, and the defeat of the more militant demands and forces, suggests as well that spontaneity is not enough, that passion and good ideas alone will not bring about change, and that the forms and organization of radical social change must be discovered. Feenberg and Freedman show that the radical student and worker cadres indeed put forward the concept of an alternative democratic organization of society and everyday life: self-management and the tradition of the workers' councils. Yet while autonomous, local organizing and struggle were defining features of the initial phase of the insurrection, and while demands for self-management and participation united students and workers in opposition, self-sustaining political organizations were never realized. Indeed, although the disparate groups came together in a General Strike that paralyzed French society and created conditions for genuinely revolutionary transformation, de Gaulle out-manuevered the opposition and doomed it to defeat.

And yet people and social life were changed. I studied in France in 1971-1972 and almost all the young people I met told me with excitement of their participation in May

'68, swore that they would never conform or be "integrated" into the system, that the Events had changed their lives in significant ways. May '68 was thus in retrospect a key event of the cultural revolution that was the 1960s, that most dramatically expressed the desire to break with established patterns of thought and behavior. May '68 was an opening, it was a harbinger of a possible change that appeared to be in motion on a world-historical scale.

To properly understand the immediate force and lasting significance of the Events of May '68 it should be stressed that the insurrection in France was part of what looked like a worldwide revolutionary movement, with branches in Latin America, China and Indochina, Japan, Mexico. The May Events seemed to confirm that the system was under significant attack. The forces of contestation appeared to be gaining ascendancy on a world scale and would soon rupture the continuum of domination.

These hopes were dashed and a contradictory legacy of May '68 emerged instead. As the assembled documents attest, for participants in the May Events, communist parties and the model of Soviet Marxism were shown to be completely bankrupt, part and parcel of the existing system of domination, and incapable of promoting genuine social and political revolution. It was necessary to cut revolutionary hopes free of those discredited experiments in the East. But for some, that break combined with the reinstallation of the Gaullist order in France and defeat of the revolutionary forces disclosed the bankruptcy of politics itself, suggesting that opposition and alternatives could only come from the margins of society, that only sustained micropolitics was viable.

Thus, in place of the revolutionary rupture in the historical continuum that 1968 had tried to produce, nascent postmodern theory in France postulated an epochal coupure, a break with modern politics and modernity, accompanied by models of new postmodern theory and politics. Hence, the postmodern turn in France in the 1970s is intimately connected to the experiences of May '68. The passionate intensity and spirit of critique in many versions of French postmodern theory is a continuation of the spirit of 1968, while the world-weary nihilism of Baudrillard and some of his followers can be related to the defeat and dispiriting aftermath of the Events of May.

Indeed, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Virilio, Derrida, Castoriadis, Foucault, Deleuze, Guatarri and other French theorists associated with postmodern theory were all participants in May '68. They shared its revolutionary elan and radical aspirations, and they attempted to develop new modes of radical thought that carried on in a different historical conjuncture the radicalism of the '60s. But whereas theorists like Herbert Marcuse and Henri Lefebvre found confirmation of their brand of utopian Marxism in the explosions of May, these postmodern theorists saw the need to break with all past forms of thought and politics and to create new ones.

For us today, May '68 continues to raise fundamental problems. The documents, analysis, and interpretation set out in this book suggest the following challenges for contemporary advanced societies:

- * Can a highly organized technological society offer fulfilling work to its members, or must they be reduced to cogs in the machine?

- * Can bureaucracies and the workplace be reshaped to allow more freedom, initiative, participation, and non-alienating activity, or are we condemned to bureaucratic and technocratic domination?

- * Can the citizens of contemporary societies recover the energy and initiative

necessary for a democratic public life, or have they been permanently stifled by mindless work and entertainment?

* Does technological progress condemn us to live and work under the control of technocratic experts and smart machines, or can we find more democratic ways to deploy our technologies and to organize our society?

These questions were posed with passionate intensity by the French students and workers, and the documents in this book challenge us too to consider how we want to work and live. Will we submit forever to alienating bureaucracies and workplace routines, or can we restructure the workplace and our social institutions? Will we allow ourselves to be governed by political elites and institutions that are unresponsive to people's needs and aspirations, or can we create a political system that is more participatory and democratic? Are we content to be passive consumers of culture and media spectacles, or can we create our own culture and make our own history?

For a brief moment, the spirit of 1968 appeared to promise fundamental change in France and in other places throughout the world. To counter historical forgetting, to keep memory and hope alive let us now rethink and relive these experiences, find connections with our contemporary situation, and strive to create our own alternative modes of thought and action. Andrew Feenberg and James Freedman are to be thanked for their work in assembling documents that allow us to gain access to an exciting historical occurrence. Now it is up to us and the coming generations to draw the appropriate conclusions.

A La Sorbonne

[This is a sample from Part I, the historical narrative of the May Events.]

The Boulevard St. Michel, Monday evening, May 13, was a scene of exaltation as students filed into the gates and reclaimed the Sorbonne. In the hot night, thousands of people penetrated into the courtyard, where groups gathered under the severe regard of Victor Hugo and Louis Pasteur, two comrades in stone, now sporting red and black flags respectively. Here, where French culture passed from adult to youth, where students were filtered from exam to job, a generation installed itself with the aim of reversing the normal process of "l'entrée dans la vie," and attacked the society they were supposed to enter.

Every amphitheater was packed on this first night of the occupation. In one hall, the debate lagged briefly and an older professor, drawn and concerned, resolved to introduce a note of dissension: to put politics in the university, he said, was to introduce agitation and disorder, and both were incompatible with serious studies. He could not make himself heard. His words might have rung true before the Events but now he stepped down unsuccessfully, yielding to the majority which ruled by the energy of revolt, and let the debate return to its already habitual bedlam.

In another lecture hall, the stage was full and the audience noisy when a familiar voice boomed into the microphone. "Go ahead say it, what you just said, say it again in front of everyone." It was Cohn-Bendit again, on the first night of the Free Sorbonne. A young man came forward: "I speak as a militant communist; don't forget that 100 years

ago, it was the Communist Party which fought for the liberation of the working class. It was the party which led the Spanish Civil War. And it was the party which fought in the Resistance and suffered the deaths..."

Cohn-Bendit took the microphone again and began apologetically:

"A minute ago, I was a little excited. I was wrong. This comrade who has just spoken is an excellent comrade. He worked against me at Nanterre, called me all kinds of names, but I don't care. It is our political direction which counts, or more importantly, our lack of it for the moment. It is necessary to question all political leadership, particularly that of the Communist Party, in view of the efficacy of spontaneous action in the streets and the continuation of the movement."

What was unique about the Sorbonne, to which Cohn-Bendit had referred, what made it the model of the entire revolt, was its refusal of all leadership. People normally fear revolutions, on any scale, not necessarily because they fear disorder (for, in fact, disorder is often exhilarating), but because they fear the severity of a new order which succeeds the abandon. On the reverse side of the wild card that is revolution lurks the constant threat of dictatorship. In the French movement, which was directed specifically against an authoritarian regime, the participants were not about to allow another system to install itself where the previous one had cruelly reigned.

Herein was the beauty of the Sorbonne of these times: it fought not only against the regime, but against the revolution, or at least the revolutionary tradition. It was the libertarian valve of the movement, open wide, imposing no order and very little opinion, refusing no one the floor, denying nothing but constraint. Programs on permanent protest, on the critical university, on the maintenance of the Sorbonne as an arena of direct democracy, were conceived as barriers against the eventuality of any and all discipline. Here was the revolution within the revolution, a radically new model proposed to the twentieth century, a revolution without dictatorship, ruled only by imagination.

All the while, jazz blared from the steps of the chapel in the outer courtyard; Dave Brubeck and Mao Tse Tung were there together in a spectacle of liberation. Many residents of the Latin Quarter, who a few nights back had thrown water onto the barricades to wash away the gas and gave the young revolutionaries refuge in their homes, came for the first time to the Sorbonne. A reception desk received visitors who wanted to know where they could go, how they could help out. Many who came for an evening stayed a week. On the third floor was a dormitory for permanent residents. Elsewhere, a nursery for young children was opened, and a food service with volunteer sweepers to deal with the dialectic of dirt.

The walls of the Sorbonne, for so long deaf and dumb to the problems of the emerging consumer society, now rebounded with Marx and Lenin, Freud and Che Guevara, offering some lessons of their own: IT IS FORBIDDEN TO FORBID. ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION. ANSWER EXAMS WITH QUESTIONS. WE WANT A WORLD, NEW AND ORIGINAL. WE REFUSE A WORLD WHERE THE ASSURANCE OF NOT DYING FROM HUNGER IS EXCHANGED FOR THE RISK OF DYING FROM BOREDOM.

Boredom and repetition were cardinal sins. In one lecture hall a standing committee led a discussion on "permanent protest"; in another, someone read a dissertation on the role of the orgy in the Roman Empire and Puritanism in China. The question was to define what cultures and what societies most fully permitted the total

liberation of the human being, and in the process no institution went unchallenged. Why should knowledge privilege a teacher over a student or parentage give a father the right to discipline his son? How to replace boss with worker and government with the people?

Out of the sentiment if not always out of the sense of the impassioned discussion, two tendencies become clear: for some, the now liberated university should combat society; for others, a new university should be created within the existing society. The former envisioned a university that would serve as a political base, widening the possibilities for spontaneous mobilization of a movement which would carry the revolution toward a new kind of socialism. The latter envisioned a more fruitful union of the university and society, a return to order and reforms through negotiation and legislation.

These two tendencies corresponded to the two faces of the larger movement: the Communist Party versus the *enragés*, the CGT versus the student-worker alliance. And as always, tension between these two faces, reformist and revolutionary, weighed heavily on the proceedings. Like a tug of war, the one in its maximalism fought against the other's compromises.

It was in such an atmosphere that the issue of exams was constantly debated. Here was the strongest point of reformist resistance to extremist pressure. The reformists appealed to the 511,000 students in France who stood to lose an entire year's credit if exams were discarded in the wake of the movement. The revolutionaries, for their part, could not have cared less. From the very beginning, the March 22 Movement had advocated a general boycott. Their analysis was simple: the exam is the key to the entire system, the goal of all scholarly work. To crack the exams, they reasoned, was to crack that system. They also recognized that if exams were scheduled, the movement would dissipate as everyone returned home with their books and manuals.

Discussions were long and heated before an accord was reached. Finally it was decided that the question of exams should be submitted to a commission of students and professors who would construct a completely new system to be administered in the fall. It was a victory for the revolutionaries, and one of them appropriately proclaimed it in a clear space on a Sorbonne wall: WE WILL HAVE GOOD MASTERS WHEN EACH WILL BE HIS OWN.

The schism continued. Reformists' meetings were calm, at appointed hours, mostly in the upper stories, sometimes bordering on the concrete and practical. It was here that the creative anarchy of the street disciplined itself to the task of reforming the university. Meanwhile, revolutionaries held meetings around the clock, debating the union of workers and students, the degradation of the Communist Party, and ways of maintaining the popular energy generated by a week of street action.

This last concern was obsessive. The movement, by its very success, had played into the hands of the government and removed itself from the public eye. In fighting with the police, the students and their allies had tapped an undauntable source of energy; but, in the Sorbonne, the only force they had to contend with was their own incapacity, the only victims of their combativeness were themselves. How now to prevent a paradoxical hardening of the revolutionary arteries?

Journal of a Neighborhood Action Committee

[This document is translated from an article published in 1968 by participants in the May Events.]

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

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." 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 building 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 Maine-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 Maléne" 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 Maine-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!" 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 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: "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 Moments

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 C.P. 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 Jeunesses Communiste, 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 200,000 old 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.

Illustrations

1. [Cover Illustration: Mai 68 Début d'une Lutte Prolongé \(May 68 Beginning of a Long Term Struggle\)](#)



2. [Frontispiece: Students in front of the Renault factory at Boulogne-](#)

Billancourt in the south of Paris in 1968. Andrew Feenberg is visible in the background on the left reading a leaflet.



The Renault factory in Boulogne-Billancourt is famous as the place where the factory occupations of the 1936 Popular Front got started. Again in 1968, the workers of Boulogne-Billancourt seized their factory during the May Events. As soon as the students learned of the seizure a march was organized from the Sorbonne to the factory. This picture from Paris Match shows the scene at the factory as the marchers arrived. The workers are visible on the roof of the building, the students below in the street. Together they sang the Internationale and cheered each other on. My class in Greek philosophy with Derrida having been interrupted by the Events, I too went on the march. I appear in this photo in the background on the left reading a leaflet.

3. Map of Paris

4. [Une Jeunesse que l'Avenir Inquiète Trop Souvent \(A Youth Too Often Worried about the Future\)](#)



5. Université Populaire Oui (People's University Yes)
6. Nous Sommes Tous Indésirable (We Are All Undesirable)
7. [Retour à la Normale... \(Return to Normal...\)](#)



8. La Lutte Continue (The Struggle Continues)
9. L'Intox Vient à Domicile (Propaganda Comes to Your Home)
10. [Image of a policeman striking](#)



11. Maine Montparnasse / La Lutte Continue! (Maine-Montparnasse / The Struggle continues!)
12. Travailleurs Français Immigré Tous Unis / A Travail Egal Salaire Egal (French and Immigrant Workers United / For Equal Work Equal Salary)
13. Renault Flins / Manifestation Gare de l'Est Mardi 11 à 19h (Renault Flins / Demonstration East Station Tuesday 11th at 7 pm)
14. La Police S'Affiche Aux Beaux Arts / Les Beaux Arts Affichent dans la Rue (The Police are Posted to the Art School / The Art School Posts in the Street)
15. A Bas les Cadences Infernales (Down With Speed-Up)
16. Pouvoir Populaire (People Power)