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THE PLAN AND THE "EVENTS OF MAY 1968" IN FRANCE

An Informal Essay on Planning and Social Change

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In May 1968 a student revolt led to the largest strike in French history. "The Events of May," as they have come to be called, have been profusely reported, filmed, tape-recorded and Telstarred. Our purpose here is not to add to that rapidly growing body of descriptive literature. Rather, in this brief note, we shall examine the connections between these events and the shape of the postwar French political economy as symbolized by the Plan. Such an analysis makes it possible to make some initial sense, or order, of what happened in May, and to attach significance to the various pieces of the rather confusing pattern of events. It also leads to a clear understanding of the Plan's worst failures--failures in its own terms and failures (or inadequacies) of its terms.

I. The Student Revolt

Analysis of the forces behind the student revolt should begin from the recent rapid, but very uneven, growth and transformation of the French economy. Since the War, the French economy has been expanding at an average rate of about 4 - 5%. But most of that expansion has been concentrated in the modernizing industrial sectors, which have not only grown but changed their character. The public sector (as distinct from publicly owned industrial enterprises) has not kept pace. The obsolete nature and inadequate extent of public services has been

* In addition to the research materials and methods upon which the rest of this book is based, the present essay draws upon information I gathered as an active and enthusiastic participant in the May Events. It took form through a series of long discussions with Mr. George W. Ross of Harvard University. Mr. Ross, who is the best young political analyst I know, is presently preparing a study of the CGT. Except for misstatements of fact, inadequacies of organization and conception and inelegancies of expression this essay is as much Mr. Ross' as mine.

one of the primary failures of the new political economy, or to use symbolic notation, of the Plan. Inadequate provision of public goods and services--even those essential to sustained economic expansion and modernization--has been the primary failure of the Plan in its own terms.

The roots of the student rebellion are to be found in this pattern of sub-system maladaptation, in the failure of the University (and the educational system as a whole) to respond to the demands of the newly transformed economy and the new social structures and political forces that economic transformation has generated.

This is not the only cause of the student revolt, or the primary determinant of its strategies and successes, but it is the most advantageous starting place for analysis. Otherwise, Paris in May becomes a rerun (however more glamorous) of Columbia in April, and the complex pattern of forces that shaped the May events and created their confusing character are lost. For the French student revolt was different from the U.S. student revolt, not only in terms of its immediate consequences (beginning with the general strike!) but in terms of its causes.

The University and the economy have grown out of phase. As a result, all kinds of powerful tensions have been created within the University system. The huge influx of students generated by recent economic changes arrives at the University to confront inadequate and outdated facilities manned by inadequate (and, many maintain, outdated) teaching staffs. The new economy generated not just a supply of students but also a demand for technical skills. The University's job, in this crude neo-capitalist model, was to equip the former with the latter. It failed, miserably and visibly.

Aside from the Grandes Ecoles (Polytechnique, ENA, Ecole Normale Supérieure), which rigorously educate only an elitist handful, the mass of students at the University were neither being "educated" in the traditional sense, nor were they being provided with the technical skills upon which economic and social success increasingly depended.

Their extreme dissatisfaction with the substance of their education was combined with acute career anxieties. Thousands of students were herded into programmes in literature, anthropology, sociology, and ethnology for degrees that led to no careers. For many, perhaps the majority, the programmes did not even lead to degrees. (This large group of badly steered and poorly-trained literature and social science students was a major motor of the revolt which "started" in the social science and literature faculty most strikingly characterized by these conditions.)

In brief, the University system failed to respond to the demands of mass education. It tried to contain within its 19th (some say 18th) century structures, the social forces generated by a rapidly expanding neo-capitalist economy. As a result, whatever integrative bonds existed in the traditional French University structures were destroyed by these new forces. Total lack of communications between students, faculty and administration predominated. The University became a great breeding ground of alienation, aimlessness, resentment and frustration, a powder keg for radicals and a source of concern for reformers. The radicals got to it first, although the reformers had a big headstart.

People with even the most rudimentary knowledge of conditions in the University system did not need the May revolt to convince them that it was desperately in need of reform. The Plan had been saying that for years; so had the social technocrats of the Club Jean Moulin and the enlightened businessmen of the Jeunes Patrons. During the past five years there has been no shortage of demands and plans for reform. Most, however, were band-aid jobs, modest construction efforts plus increases in the numbers of underpaid, overworked and, it seems, never-promoted teaching assistants (who needless to say, played a major role in the revolt). Reforms were decreed from above and implemented (or more often pigeon-holed) through the administrative hierarchy of the Ministry of Education, a highly centralized, inept bureaucracy whose one ability (and in this area it was rivaled only by the New York City Board of Education) was for stripping reforms of their purpose. Crucially, however, it was not administrative unwieldiness that stopped the reform efforts. It was a political choice: neither the determination nor the resources to work fundamental reforms were directed at the educational system.

The failure of the University to adapt to the pressures and demands of the new economy created the conditions that permitted the student radicals to be so successful. In France, unlike the United States, the great mass of largely non-political (and certainly non-radical) students were dissatisfied and frustrated not just with the social relations prevalent in the University, and not just with the

great injustices perpetrated in the nation and the world (especially in Vietnam), but with the immediate damage that the University was doing to them personally. Beyond all else--beyond the international student revolts, beyond the dehumanizing social relations, beyond the impact of New Left ideologies--what made the student revolt so powerful was the inability of the University to provide the great mass of students with what they most wanted, with what seemed most legitimate: training for the technical skills that would lead to good careers and upward mobility. Thus, the mass of students who normally (i.e., in the typical U.S. or U.K. setting) remain indifferent to the radicals' calls to action and thereby determine the radicals' failure by isolating them (and occasionally, actively opposing them) were ready to demand fundamental reforms. All it would take would be the slightest spark to trigger not just an outburst from a small group of radicals protesting distant injustices or making demands that the average student would not consider worth getting excited about, but a massive protest movement firmly rooted in the great majority of students demanding what they felt to be vital, legitimate and long overdue reforms.

It could have started anywhere. But for admirers of elegant irony it is best that it started at Nanterre. For Nanterre is the concrete example of the reformers' failure. It is a new campus for social sciences and literature just outside Paris. Some of the planning was clever; its students are drawn from the 16^e arrondissement of Paris, mostly from rich families. In this way social stigmas associated with a new campus are overcome. But mostly, the planning

was a disaster and the realization even worse. Nanterre was supposed to be a low-budget spectacular; the only thing spectacular about it was the way in which its failure was finally demonstrated. Everything about the place seemed to conspire to mock the planners.

A new subway line will, one day, link Nanterre directly with Paris. At the moment a commuter train services the campus; the station is called "La Folie--Complex Universitaire." The drive to Nanterre takes you through a tour of all the contradictions of French society. Students take the drive twice daily. The road twists through construction projects and great bulldozed lots and ditches. The background is provided by vast, high-rise, faded concrete housing projects. In the foreground is a bidonville (shantytown)--a good sized cluster of rotten little shacks in which the Algerians who are digging the roads and subways live in conditions that are supposed to be found only in underdeveloped countries. Nanterre is classic; at no place since Versailles have the social relations been more perfectly expressed in the architecture.

The "learning process" takes place in an enormous horizontal structure that consists, essentially, of a vast corridor--at least as long as a football field and about fifty feet wide. The corridor is made, of course, of grey concrete. (The students have taken to painting bright designs along the walls to dent the oppression a bit.) Off the corridors are enormous lecture halls, some equipped with tell-tale TV setups. At one end is a pathetic snack bar: stand up tables. What goes on is clear. Vast numbers of students flow from lecture hall to lecture hall through the corridor. (The layout is similar to Orly Airport; so is the traffic flow function.)

At Nanterre, communications were nonexistent; so were any sense of purpose or achievement.

There was little contact among students. The physical plant, like that of the Sorbonne, did not provide any places for informal contact among the commuter students, and the isolation of the campus precluded the use of local cafés--the basis of social relations at the Sorbonne. Faculty contact was simply out of the question. There were too many students and too few teachers. The teachers would, typically, drive out to the campus, read a lecture, and vanish.

Few of the students seemed to have any idea of what they were supposed to be studying, and fewer still knew why. They hung around taking courses here and there and preparing for exams that had little to do with anything. They knew they were being processed, not educated, and they resented it. The painfully obvious fact that they were being purposelessly processed to fit into disappearing economic and social structures turned their resentment to rage.

The radicals understood that for most of its students Nanterre represented a combination of purposeless processing in an environment of oppressive social relations; it was potentially explosive. The University administration and government officials did not; their lack of understanding defeated them.

The radicals drew examples, impetus and ideology from the international student movement and from the political ferment generated by the Vietnam War. Tactical audacity coupled with ideological timidity, a refusal to go beyond general leftism in defining a positive programme

(which would have been divisive) was the radical formula. Under the correct conditions--a series of incidents to engage the mass, re-enforced and accelerated by ill-informed reactions by the University officials--they could precipitate a substantial student protest movement. With luck and skill, it could become massive and radical.

They had more luck than they could imagine--and more skill too. They also benefited enormously from the ignorance of the University officials. The student radicals triggered a series of small incidents. The University authorities, acting on their unlimited faith in the efficacy of minority isolation-manipulation-repression and their total unawareness of the mass support for the protests, found themselves locked into a spiral of student demonstrations, administrative repression; larger demonstrations, more repression (coupled with some minor reforms); etc., etc.,....Of course repression can stop protest movements--especially ones that have no popular support. In this case, however, it provided the radicals with the necessary unifying and mobilizing issues and led to the progressive mobilization, politicization and radicalization of ever-greater numbers of students. Then the movement spread, first to the Sorbonne, then to the other French Universities, then to the lycées, to important segments of the adult intelligentsia and finally to nine million workers.

In the student rebellion that triggered the largest strike in French history, a radical minority took the leadership and provided direction for a mass movement of reformist origins; in the general strike, an established leadership of short-run reformist objectives kept its grip on a mass outburst of radicalism.

II. The General Strike

Sans la CGT nous sommes perdus
Avec elle, nous sommes cloués.
A striker

At least one thing about the strike is certain: it did not begin in the executive councils of the CGT. It was a chain reaction of wildcats.

Our purpose in this brief note is not to trace out a blow-by-blow history of the strike. Rather, it is to propose some ideas and some questions that might help to make sense of what happened. And the critical factor in all that happened--and all that did not happen--was the Communist Party and the CGT.¹ Nothing makes sense without an understanding of the actions (and inactions) of the Communists.

Communist Strategy

May caught the Communists by surprise. A major social crisis--let alone a potentially revolutionary general strike--was absolutely the last thing the French Communist Party expected. Indeed, during the past few years the French Communist Party, following slowly behind its Italian counterpart, had reached the conclusion that the kind of

¹In the following pages I have generally merged the Communist Party and the CGT into one political force. This might bother some readers. I am well aware that there are many noncommunist members in the CGT and that some even hold leadership positions. Nonetheless, in the interests of both brevity and a certain kind of realism, it is foolish to ignore the constant similarity of positions taken by the PC and the CGT and the more or less total domination of the CGT by the Communists. It is simply silly to imagine, for example, that Frachon, Ségué and Krasucki (the three most important leaders of the CGT) change significantly as they shuttle back and forth between the Bureau Confédéral of the CGT and the Politbureau of the PC. Nor is it an assertion of militant anticommunism to remark that noncommunist leaders in the CGT rarely hold "key positions."

revolutionary crisis that its traditional insurrectional strategy depended upon was unlikely to occur in neo-capitalist France.

The Party's reevaluation of the realities of advanced capitalism meant abandoning the idea of a one-party dictatorship of the proletariat coming to power through mass armed insurrection. In its place the Party slowly and painfully elaborated a new strategy for "a peaceful French road to Socialism."

Peaceful meant legal and legal meant electoral. The broad tactical implications of this new "de-Stalinized" strategy are quite clear: Left alliances. A vast United Front of all potentially Left forces would have to be built. The Party would have to win over the non-Communist Left, and to do this it would have to live down a lot of history: Stalinist strategy, tactics and organization would have to be abandoned; so would the whole Comintern image.

The "peaceful path" strategy also implied a total change in the traditional Communist scenario for how the transformation to Socialism was to be achieved after the accession to power. "Democratic, bi-polar socialism" was the logical new answer. Two socialist parties, the Communist Party and a revitalized ex-non-Communist Left (re-radicalized somehow, through the dynamics of partnership and struggle) would compete and cooperate, democratically, in bringing about Socialism. Only through a democratic process could Socialism be realized in modern France. The capacity of neo-capitalist society to contain and absorb opposition, the repressive apparatus of the modern state, and the menace of foreign intervention would prevent any violent seizure of

power or authoritarian imposition of socialism. Furthermore, should the Communists somehow be able to seize power, the opposition of a majority of Frenchmen would make the transformation of the complex and delicate advanced industrial society into a socialist society impossible without an intolerable amount of coercion.

Following out the tactical implications of this strategic analysis on a day-to-day basis the Communist Party has, during the past few years, been trying to convince all potentially socialist forces to its right that Stalinism was a thing of the past--and the Cold War too--and that the future belonged to the peaceful and democratic construction of French socialism. All recent (pre-May) tactics of the Party make sense in this light: unity of action programmes with the non-Communist trade unions; support for Mitterand in the Presidential elections; encouragement of electoral alliances with the non-Communist Federation of the Left, etc. The existence of Gaullism created difficulties, but also special short-run advantages for this strategy. The Gaullist regime was arbitrary, anti-democratic and majestically unresponsive to French social needs. Many people were anti-Gaullist, for many reasons. And the only real alternative to Gaullism was a Left alliance. In this analysis French politics quickly reduces to the Gaullists trying to increase their strength by moving from right to left, and the Communists trying to broaden out from left to right. The CP saw the Left as the eventual winner. It also saw how the continued existence of Gaullism would help in the task of building and testing the United Front alliance. Should Gaullism collapse and the non-Communist Left come to power without the aid of the Communists (as

had happened in the past) the CP could be locked back into the sterility of its Cold War isolation, and the post-Gaullist era would be, as far as the CP was concerned, a rerun of the anti-Communist socialism of the Fourth Republic. Furthermore, Gaullist foreign policy was of distinct advantage to the CP. Any success in de Gaulle's efforts to reduce Cold War tensions in Europe would greatly help the CP in its efforts to escape from its Cold War isolation. In brief, the Communist Party would think at least twice before rushing to the kill should Gaullism show signs of collapsing.

The Students, the Strikers and the Party

The student movement was growing bigger and more violent. The Gaullists couldn't suppress it and the Communists couldn't control it. Worst of all, it kept getting more political. The radicals (Maoists, Castroists, Anarchists, Renegade Communists, Trotskyites and, most important, general, or New Leftists) had seized the leadership of the student revolt and were succeeding in politicizing the mass of previously nonpolitical students. At incredible speed, the student revolt stopped talking about new dormitories and smaller classes and began to talk of Revolution and contact with the working class.

The Party was in a bind. The student revolt was proclaiming an independent revolutionary ideology, Marxist in tone, that was in direct contradiction with the Party's strategy. The students were declaring a Revolutionary Situation and trying to form independent alliances with the working class. What could the Party do? Its new strategy was repugnant to the new student revolutionaries. It had little direct influence over the students. Regular Communists among the students

were few; their organizations had lost membership and influence during the past years and they were largely irrelevant to the revolt. This was in part the legacy of years of neglect (some say scorn) of students by the Party. Traditionally, the Party had dealt with the special problems presented by students through expulsion or isolation. Many of the most energetic student militants had, at one time or another, been thrown out or had quit. Most of the others seemed to hate the Party as much as they hated the Gaullists.

The Party's first response was to try to isolate the revolutionary students from the workers and, if possible, from the mass of students. From the beginning through the end of the May Events, Party officials and Party propaganda organs poured out the invective: Cohn-Bendit was "a German Anarchist," others were "provocateurs," "adventurists," and "infantile Leftists." All belonged to "groupuscules," and were misleading the mass of decent students.

Party logic was simple, direct and traditional. The Communist Party represents the revolutionary movement of the people. The student revolutionaries were opposing Party strategy. Therefore, even though they may subjectively have thought they were revolutionaries, objectively they were counterrevolutionaries, their actions objectively serving the ruling class and hurting the people.

The second step was to try to turn a threat into an asset. If the student movement could be separated from its revolutionary leaders and changed from an adventurist revolt into a powerful and attractive movement for educational reform and democracy, it could well turn out to be an unanticipated blessing for the Party. The Party knew that popular

opinion resented the social policies of the Gaullist government and that the students--mostly middle class--had aroused considerable sympathy and support in large segments of the population, including many of those same groups whose support, or at least acceptance, the CP was already seeking. Along with the denunciations of the leaders and their "irresponsible" actions, the Party issued a steady stream of statements supporting the "real" grievances of the students: more resources for education, reformed curricula and democratized access.

During the night of May 10-11, there was a particularly bloody battle between students and police in the barricaded streets around the Rue Gay-Lussac. The Party decided to respond quickly and to reassert its leadership. Seizing the initiative from the students (and from the CFDT), the CGT called a twenty-four-hour general strike for May 13 (also the tenth anniversary of de Gaulle's return to power). At least 100,000 workers were mobilized to march with the students in an orderly demonstration of strength to oppose police brutality and to support the students' "real" demands. The Politbureau issued the mot d'ordre: an end to police repression and a democratic reform of the University.

In many ways the demonstration was a huge success. The Party once again showed its strength, stopping production and mobilizing, on instant notice, hundreds of thousands of workers. In other ways, it foreshadowed disaster for the Party. For, even at the demonstration, something began to go wrong. Discipline slipped slightly. Initiative kept shifting from the Party leadership to the base. Adventurist student

slogans often replaced the more sober Party slogans. Students persistently broke ranks to fraternize with workers, and they were well received.

That same night (May 13-14) the students occupied the Sorbonne. Twelve hours later, workers at Sud-Aviation (Nantes) struck, occupied the factory and wrote "Yesterday Slaves--Today Free Men" on the walls. The next day the Renault plant at Cléon was occupied by its wildcatting workers. Within four days some five million workers were on strike; by the end of the following week, eight to ten million, more than twice as many as in the great general strike of the Popular Front period.

The spontaneity, the speed, the scale and the political intensity of the strike surprised everyone: the students who triggered it; the workers who made it; the Government who tried to stop it; and the Communist Party who lost it and tried to recapture it.

The strike rested on a solid base of traditional, quantitative grievances. Rising prices had eaten up increases in workers' incomes. Unemployment--though negligible by contrast with the U.S.--had risen brusquely and the government continued to talk of belt-tightening and austerity. Working hours were among the longest in Europe. Protections against speed-ups and job shifts were weak. Regional disparities were serious and intensifying, and several regions (such as Nantes, where the first strike occurred) were beginning to suffer. Young workers were especially affected by these conditions and by the fact that starting salaries were disproportionately low, and apprenticeship programmes long, exploitative and closed-end. Finally, recent reductions

in social security benefits hurt the workers economically and also underscored the government's arrogant insensitivity in dealing with workers.

These "bread and butter" grievances were sufficiently pressing to generate a major strike, and many people in France expected a wave of strikes before the summer. But analysis of the May Events confined to these traditional, quantitative matters can never succeed in explaining the unusual nature and dynamic of those Events. For what made May different and important is that it was a "political" strike as well as an economic strike, a strike against traditional structures of authority and for new forms of social relations at every level of organization, as well as a strike for higher wages and shorter hours.

The CGT desperately tried to recapture control of the strike movement and turn it away from dangerous adventurism. First it called an official general strike from above, after well over a million workers had already gone out on their own. Then it set about "de-adventurizing" the strike. The revolutionary political demands that emerged from the strikers were repressed and ridiculed by the Party, which called them "meaningless," "gauchiste," "adventurist" sell-outs of the workers' "real interests."²

²The CFDT, the second largest trade union central, took up some of the strikers' anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic longings in a large part out of conviction (the CFDT had been drifting towards the Contestative Participationist Socialism described above) and in part out of a desire to steal thunder and members from the CGT.

The CGT tried to minimize the possibility of contact between workers and student revolutionaries. Its National Festival of Young Workers was called off; the CGT did not want to see what might happen if it united several thousand young workers. In factories dominated by the CGT, strikers were sent home--except for a relatively small number of "safe" party stalwarts who assured the occupation.³ In brief, the CGT did absolutely everything it could to bring the strike back to traditional, "reasonable" demands while it rushed, as fast as it could, to negotiate an end to the strike.

While the Communist Party was desperately trying to demonstrate its new-found devotion to Peacefulness and Legality, Order seemed to be falling apart. The Pompidou government appeared to be inadequate to the situation. De Gaulle's first dramatic television broadcast--his reappearance on the scene--proved to be a disaster. Instead of demonstrating authority and restoring order, he revealed incomprehension, weakness, age and a general inability to master the situation: he accelerated the crisis. Forces within the government began to press for de Gaulle's retirement and the Gaullist Parliamentary majority appeared to be disintegrating.

In an effort to calm the crisis the CGT hastily signed the Grenelle Accords limiting the workers' victory to purely "economic" gains that were hardly commensurate with the scale and intensity of the greatest strike in French history. Even the "échelle mobile"--the cost-of-living escalator that the CGT, in its battles with the "gauchistes"

³By contrast, in CFDT-dominated plants, the occupation was often held en masse and long political discussions were a principal activity.

had claimed to be the key grievance--was abandoned (or, according to the CGT interpretation of the agreements, postponed for re-negotiation one year later).

Then disaster hit. Beginning at the Renault plant, and continuing in factory after factory, the workers rejected the Grenelle agreements and voted to continue the strike.

At this point most observers--and almost all the participants--were sure that the situation was completely out of control and that major political changes would follow.

General de Gaulle disappeared. The immediate rumor (later confirmed) was that he had gone off to secure support, or at least a no-coup pledge, from General Massu, symbol of Algérie Française militarism and putschism. The atmosphere of crisis intensified.

Mitterand declared himself available and Mendès France surfaced briefly as the non-Communist Left prepared to accede to power on the imminent collapse of Gaullism. This revival of the Third Force concept was just what the Party feared. It was, for the Communists, probably worse than Gaullism.

The Communist Party and the CGT desperately trying, once again, to gain control of the strike movement and also to anticipate the immediate collapse of Gaullism, issued a call for a Popular Government. By no means was this a call to revolution. Rather it was an attempt to prepare workers for the legal transfer of power to a new government headed by the non-Communist Left and also an attempt to prevent its own exclusion from that government. It backfired.

De Gaulle returned and attacked. This time he spoke on radio, not television. In tones of anger and authority he announced that he would not retire and that he was dissolving the Assembly immediately and scheduling elections for late June. Claiming to understand the basic longings of the revolutionary strikers and the students, he announced that he would soon propose a plan to establish "Participation" in all areas of French life. Participation would define a third way, between capitalism and communism. Then he resorted to the old bugaboo of warning the nation of the imminent danger of Totalitarian Communist Dictatorship and called for a massive demonstration in support of order and himself.

He got the demonstration, that very afternoon. The strikers' militancy in rejecting the Grenelle agreements and the Communist Party's call for a "popular Government" had precipitated a massive regrouping of the forces of order. De Gaulle capitalized on their great fear. Hundreds of thousands of Gaullists, conservatives, rightists and just scared citizens responded to his call and marched up the Champs-Élysées in an impressive show of strength and support.

He also succeeded in his principal objective of shifting the crisis to an electoral plane. Here, the CP was his most powerful ally. Despite the fact that its determined defense of legality had been dishonestly and cynically ignored by de Gaulle in his efforts to provoke an anti-communist hysteria, the Communist Party proved to be totally committed to bringing the crisis to a rapid end and espoused the "electoral solution" with even greater enthusiasm than the Gaullists. The denouement was rapid.

Concluding Remarks

The Events of May were a confusing mix--part a traditional protest and part an apparently new kind of rebellion. At this early date, it is impossible to "weigh" these two components so as to define and evaluate the role and importance of each. But it is possible to relate them to the new political economy and to its chief symbol, the Plan. For both components of the May Events were directed against the Plan.

The traditional protests stemmed from, and were directed against, the failures of the Plan in its own terms: an archaic and unproductive University system that frustrated the great mass of students in their efforts to prepare for a proper place in the new society; and long hours, low real wage increases, little job security and unacceptable working conditions that belied the promises of ever increasing affluence that the Plan made to the mass of workers.

The radical rebellion was a refusal to accept the tight limits the Plan proposed for future social changes. The Plan, and the political economy it represented, reached their limits at any idea of radical alterations of authority structures, at any attempt to redistribute power at every level of social organization in order to create fundamentally different social relations.

Student revolutionaries rebelled against the University's role of training a supply of competent technicians to meet the needs of the expanding and modernizing economy and against traditional structures of authority within the University and the society at large. The student revolutionaries were refusing and rebelling against precisely what the Plan wanted, but failed, to achieve.

Highly skilled and highly paid technical and creative workers and executives at the ORTF (French Radio-Television)--the group most clearly benefitting from the new political economy, the living models of the Plan's success--rebelled and demanded, not higher wages or better production facilities, but liberation from the close government control which had reduced the ORTF to a propaganda organ, and Democracy. And they defined democracy in a strikingly different manner from the Plan.

In industry after industry workers rebelled, but their radical political grievances remained vague, confused and inarticulate. They were never translated into concrete proposals for change in part because of the unresponsiveness of the principal working class organizations to those demands, and in part because of their inherent vagueness, newness and troublesomeness.

Just as one component of the May Events--the protests--represented demands for the realization of the Plan's objectives, for "success" in the Plan's own terms, so the second component--the rebellions--represented a refusal to accept those terms, a demand for a new kind of Plan and a new kind of political economy.

Once it had recovered its security, the Gaullist government responded in a predictable fashion: a serious show of force to discourage another outburst and an attempt to correct some of the "failures" that were revealed in May. Thus, for the students, a strong show of administrative severity and para-police "monitors" at Nanterre coupled with the Faure Plan, a programme of University reform, ambitious in its conception, but modest in its funding. The goal is modernization.

And despite present difficulties, it will probably be reached: France will finally get low-budget Berkeleys. Modern Universities with less unwieldly administrative structures--such as Vincennes, the instant university--will appear. And student "participation" will be instituted. University councils with elected student representatives will be created and given some say in some areas of University policy. But how much say and about what, is presently impossible to know. It is easier to anticipate the long-term response to these forthcoming reforms than to predict their detailed substance. More rebellions will follow. At the beginning they will tend to follow the May model in which a minority of student revolutionaries succeeded in turning the frustrations of the average student, which derived from the Plan's failure to realize its own objectives, against those objectives. As the reforms achieve some measure of success, the rebellions will not stop. Instead, they will tend to become purer cases of rebellion against the Plan's terms, moving in some ways, closer to the American University revolts.

Patching up the Plan's failures in areas other than the University will be a different matter. Rising prices are eating away most of the workers' "traditional victory" at Grenelle--an effect anticipated by all parties, workers as well as government.

De Gaulle's principal response to the strike was his promise to institute "Participation." His perception of the need to go beyond business as usual and venture into the area of fundamental political change placed him, as usual, well above other politicians. But in this case, as in so many others, De Gaulle's distinction remains within the

realm of rhetoric. The formula--Participation--awaits definition. Beyond personalities, however strong, there are identifiable political forces that will determine the shape and significance of any Participation scheme any Centre-Right Government might propose. In discussing the possibilities open to "Participation," it is necessary to separate the forms it can take from the importance or impact it can achieve. For the most likely outcome is an elaborate tour de force of change without change. New and complex words and institutions will be created. But they will have little importance, for the distribution of power will not be affected.

Participation will be closer to the old Vichyite Association Capital-Travail, with a touch of "profit sharing," than to any kind of radical redistribution of economic power that would restructure social relations. The Vichyite formula is consistent with Gaullist corporatist ideas of political organization. It is also in perfect harmony with the Plan's traditional communitarian rhetoric and its operational corporatism.

The word corporatism must be cleansed of its Mussolini overtones. There will be no thugs, no vulgarity and no overt brutality. Essentially corporatist participation will involve the institution of some sort of vertical representation. Social roles--business leaders, consumer groups, trade unions, banks, etc., will be represented. The form fits perfectly with the long cherished conservative image of all the corporations of the realm harmoniously cooperating in the construction of the Great Cathedral of modern society--the Plan. In many ways it will represent simply the formalization of the pressure

group, or lobby politics, that have come to dominate large areas (especially in economic administration) of the political life of Western democracies. Attempts to formalize corporatist politics are not new in France. Corporatist Democracy has held a steady and strong attraction not only for the Pétains and the de Gaulles, the peasants and the cartel-minded business leaders, but even for such socialists and democrats as Mendès-France as, for example, in his proposal for a corporatist second house of Parliament, in La République Moderne.

The form of the proposed Participation will be corporatist, but the importance of the reform is a separate question. Should Participation come to anything at all--and there is a good chance that it will come to absolutely nothing--it is likely to result in purely window-dressing corporatism. For no matter what form the new councils, committees and assemblies take, the present holders of economic power are not prepared to turn over important areas of decision-making to them. A serious shift of power over economic decisions implies a risk of reducing productivity, and neither the Government nor the business groups see any compelling need to run such a risk. Their determination to protect productivity is incalculably strengthened by the direction any major shift in power must take--away from them. The likelihood of a Gaullist or a Right-Centre Government leading a frontal assault on the prerogatives and power of management within the firm is very, very small; the possibility of success in such a matter is even smaller. Nor are the businessmen ready, as the experience of the Plan shows, to abdicate any important areas of decision making to

any newly formed, corporatist second house of Parliament. Serious redistribution of power is out. Instead, vertical assemblies and councils will be formed at various levels of organization--perhaps the firm, probably the region, and possibly the Nation. Their purpose will be to give workers the illusion of participating in the common endeavour (which will remain economic expansion) and to convince them of the paramount importance of that task and of the necessity of preserving the present distribution of economic power. Communitarian rhetoric will flow. Everyone will be encouraged to "belong, cooperate and participate." But the new structures will have little real power. The councils and assemblies will produce advisory recommendations--rather like the present Economic and Social Council, which is a living example of what "Participation" is most likely to recreate and perhaps, multiply. But the substance of decision making power will not be affected.

Perhaps, over time, the new corporatist bodies will grow and lead France to a third path that will be neither classic capitalism nor communism. But that third path will not be a new path. It has been visible beneath the rather thin surface of liberal democracy in France for years, and it is still best described by the word corporatism. There is not the slightest doubt that the Plan, as it is presently constituted, fits snugly into that system. For the Plan, with its group representation commissions, its appearance of broadly distributed power, and its reality of a powerful partnership of big business executives and ranking civil servants is the model for it all. It is the most important piece of "corporatist democracy" in France.

If participation is to mean anything at all, it must mean a redistribution of economic power, a fundamental reorganization of authority structures. The Gaullists are neither willing nor able to institute that. As a response to the radical rebellion component of the May events, Participation in its Gaullist conception can only be a red herring.

The essential question raised in May was that of the future of democracy in France. De Gaulle's response was to seize its essence in a dramatic word--Participation--and then to present, in its name, a programme for preserving the existing distribution of power. The Communist Party responded to the rebellion with even greater inflexibility.

May was a disaster for the Party. From beginning to end the Party chased after events. All its actions were reactions. But they were consistent. They all aimed at diffusing, controlling and finally stopping the broad and sudden social movement which threatened the Party's new strategy. The Party demonstrated its power. There is no doubt that it played a crucial role in preventing major political changes and in saving the Gaullist Fifth Republic. In the short run, at least, the Party was badly rewarded for its services.

When, for a moment, it appeared that the Gaullist government would crumble, the non-Communist Left began to take careful distance from the Party and to prepare to form a Third Force type government. The Gaullists rallied the Right, the scared, the confused and the bothered by cynically promoting an anti-Communist hysteria and thereby

obtained their greatest electoral victory ever. And the far Left turned its rebellion against the Party, which even more than the Government, became its symbol of outdated repression.

New Left "groupuscules," against which most of the Party's moves had been directed, challenged the Party's claim to Revolutionary leadership. They attacked the Party as a de facto supporter of the status quo. The more extravagant claimed that a Revolutionary Situation had finally developed and that the Party had done its best to crush it. The Party responded to its "infantile leftist" accusers by claiming that no such Revolutionary Situation had existed and that armed insurrection would lead only to fascist repression.

Within the context of such an idiotic debate the Party was, of course, correct. A massive Communist-led insurrection was out of the question. But that was not the only revolutionary possibility. Between leading an armed revolution and the conservative role the Party chose to play there were other serious alternatives. But the Party was blind to them. It was this blindness, rather than the irresponsibility of the "groupuscules," or the power of the Gaullists, that made May a disaster for the Party. The Party was the victim of its own monolithic bureaucracy and its own sterile strategy.

May revealed that de-Stalinization within the Party was far from complete. The surprise with which the rebellion caught the Party demonstrated that the leadership was out of touch with the base. During the crisis, when important decisions had to be taken, real debate within the Party, and fruitful discussion and disagreement between the Party

and the outside, proved to be practically impossible. In brief, May showed that the Party bureaucracy remained as unresponsive as ever, and that serious contradictions existed between the Party's new de-Stalinized strategy and the continuing Stalinism of its organization.

More important, May also revealed that the new strategy was incomplete and inadequate, and that a major rethinking of Party strategy was desperately needed. The new strategy is still based on a very old image of how revolutionary change is to be achieved. The essential difference is that the scenario now calls for the Party to take power peacefully and legally instead of by mass insurrection. But revolutionary change still comes from the top down and it still happens all at once, after the Party "takes power." Until then there can be little positive revolutionary change. The crucial revolutionary process remains that of substituting a bureaucracy which acts on behalf of the people for a bureaucracy which acts on behalf of the capitalists. Thus the new strategy, like the old is a policy of attentisme, or watchful waiting, for the Party's advent to power.

The new strategy, with its promises of bureaucracy, attentisme, and centralized change from the top down, was completely contrary to the fundamental objectives of the rebellion. When the crisis broke, the Party found that it could either stick to its strategy and try to stop the rebellion, or it could abandon its strategy. The Party chose to follow its strategy, and it did so, throughout the May Events, with an awesome consistency.

May showed that the Revolutionary Situation, the moment for mass armed insurrection, will not come in an advanced industrial society: the Party had been right to abandon its old strategy. But May also showed that major social crises can occur under modern capitalism and that the Party has no strategy for dealing with them.

The prospects for a major rethinking of Party strategy are not very bright. What is likely to happen is that the Party will note the first conclusion and ignore the second. It will draw the lesson that the new strategy had only suffered a minor setback and ought to be pursued; in other words, that the Party had not only been correct to be consistent, but had been consistently correct.

May, once again, raised the question of the future of democracy in France, and once again, action on the question was postponed.