

Worker-Student Action Committees (excerpt)

May/June 1968

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FE Note: What follows are thoughts on the revolutionary upsurge which shook France 20 years ago. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the message is that revolt is possible in modern society. In ours today, it is not the cops which prevent revolt, but the inertia of what is—the weight of the present.

The introductory section is from the fine new magazine, *No Picnic*, Spring 1988, Box 69393, Stn. K, Vancouver BC, Canada V5K 4W6; \$1.50 per issue. The piece from Fredy Perlman, written from a participant's viewpoint, appeared in *Worker-Student Action Committees*, co-authored by R. Gregoire, 1968, \$2 from FE Books. The excerpt from Jacques Camatte appeared originally in FE #295, November 3, 1978 and is available at \$1. Also recommended is Paris: May 1968, by Solidarity, available from FE Books for \$3.

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The explosion which paralyzed France in May 1968 was a frustrated revolution and a clear warning. It represents a frustrated revolution to the students and workers who were rushing, almost blind with joy and enthusiasm, into a new society. But the revolt and the strike are a warning to all ruling classes, a warning to capitalists and bureaucrats, to governments and unions. The frustrated revolutionaries are beginning to take stock of the accomplishments and are attempting to pinpoint the shortcomings.

However, the revolutionaries are not the only ones who are taking stock. The forces of repression are also undertaking the task of analyses; they too are taking stock of the accomplishments, or rather the dangers unveiled for them in May '68. And the revolutionaries will not be the only ones who will prepare for the next crises; the ruling classes will also prepare, and not only in France. Politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists will define the forms of the May revolution, so as to prevent their re-appearance; they will study the sequence of events, so as to prevent a recurrence of May 1968.

The sequence of events which led to a sudden confrontation between French state capitalism and a determined revolutionary movement caught both sides by surprise. Neither side was prepared. But the moment of hesitation was fatal only to the revolutionaries; the ruling class took advantage of the brief pause to extinguish the fire. The fact that only one side gained from the pause is understandable; the revolutionaries would have had to rush into the unexplored, the unknown, whereas the "forces of order" were able to fall back to well known, in fact classical forms of repression.

The revolutionary movement rushed forward at a tremendous speed, reached a certain line, and then suddenly disoriented, confused, perhaps afraid of the unknown, stopped just long enough to allow the enormous French police forces to push the movement back, disperse it and destroy it. Reflection now begins on both sides. Revolutionaries are beginning to define the line which was reached; they are determined to go beyond it "next time." They had come so close, and yet were pushed back so far! To many it was clear that steps into the unknown had been taken, that the line had in fact been crossed, that the sea had in fact begun to flow over the dam.

The ruling classes have been warned; one must assume that they will take the necessary precautions. Analyses of the particular cracks in the dam through which the floodwaters rushed will be undertaken by both sides. Such analyses will be a documentation of a particular event, a history of a revolution that failed.

On the basis of this documentation, ruling classes will prepare themselves to prevent the recurrence of the same event. This is why revolutionaries cannot use the documentation as a basis for the preparation of a future event: the same cracks will not be found twice in the same dam; they will have been repaired and the entire dam will have been raised. A future tidal wave will find new cracks in the dam, cracks which are as invisible to insurgents as to defenders of the old order.

Historians will describe through which cracks the sea rushed in May 1968. The task of revolutionary theory is to analyze the sea itself; the task of revolutionary action is to create a new tidal wave. If the sea represents the entire working population, and if the tidal wave represents the determination to re-appropriate all the forms of social power which have been alienated to capitalists and bureaucrats at all levels of social life, then new cracks will be found, and if the dam is immaculate it will be swept away in its entirety.

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