

France

Joel Parker

PARIS (LNS)—At first glance the only visible change resulting from the May revolution in France are some repaved streets and felled trees.

DeGaulle's use of the two-sided club of repression and reform seems to have succeeded in placating the dissatisfied majority and in silencing militants. But the lull in political activity is deceiving; the movement is now perhaps at its most crucial stage, preparing the educational and organizational groundwork for a successful revolution.

The events of May were merely a prelude to change, occurring in an organizational vacuum that allowed an establishment Communist Party to speak for the left without representing it, to beg for reforms when the people demanded revolution. French radicals regard the spontaneity of May, so applauded by American leftists as the symptom of the movement's failure—specifically its lack of organization. Filling that void today are the comites d'action (action committees).

These relatively small and autonomous groups were formed during the May revolution to give people with common oppressors a chance to meet and discuss actions. There are committees in almost every school and factory, as well as student-worker and neighborhood committees.

By increasing the level of direct personal involvement and minimizing centralization and traditional concepts of leadership, the action committees have been able to expand in the face of the Gaullist repression.

The new Minister of Interior, Raymond Marcelin, is an avid proponent of law and order. Viewing the May events as part of an "internationally coordinated revolutionary conspiracy," Marcelin has pledged quick suppression of all revolutionary groups, including meetings and actions.

The police force has been greatly expanded, with special attention given to new riot equipment and "subversive investigations." Militants in the factories have been fired, student leaders arrested or expelled. But while all the official radical leftist groups have been banned, the unofficial action committees have thus far escaped the repression.

Gaullist attempts at reform also appear destined for failure. The wage increases granted to workers were almost immediately nullified by a 6.5% rise in the cost of living, twice that of previous years. DeGaulle's promise of "participation" in the factories has proved essentially meaningless. Contrary to the prediction that the workers, after the failure in May, would be unwilling to act for a long period, there have been a number of recent strikes. Their effect has been weakened by an almost total news blackout by the French and world bourgeois press.

Educational reforms initiated by the new Minister of Education, Edgar Faure, may prove more successful in channeling off dissent. Faced with an archaic educational system last reformed by Napoleon, Faure has adopted many of the proposals advanced by student action committees including decentralization of the faculties, smaller classes and changes in the exam system.

Although student radicals view the reforms as basically structural and apolitical, they concede that the majority of students might temporarily be satisfied. The radicals seek to contest and reveal the bankruptcy of the reform.

In the high schools, the students' militancy has not suffered from Faure's promises of reform. Angered by widespread expulsions of May activists, high school students staged a national daylong strike on November 13, after weeks of daily agitation.

The comites d'action lyceen called for and organized the strike, demanding the right to hold political meetings in school, the reinstatement of those expelled, the abolition of military preparatory classes (the French equivalent of ROTC) and the opening of the schools to non-students. Another strike action was called in "solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle, to see the high school become part of the world-wide anti-imperialist movement."

Behind the continued organizing activity of the students and workers lies the assumption that a capitalist France can not resolve its social and economic con traditions. Although the current crisis of the franc is outside the scope of this article, at the least it signals the failure of an already struggling economy to absorb the losses incurred in May. As the prospect of a wide-spread economic crisis increases, the work of the action committees takes on greater importance. The success of the political organizing and educational programs now going on will probably decide if the next revolutionary situation realizes the vision of May—a socialist France.

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