

(B) THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A
REBELLION—MAY-JUNE, 1968

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Before proceeding to an analysis of France's student troubles of last spring (see the chronology thereof), certain characteristics of these disturbances should perhaps be mentioned.

First of all is the remarkable fact that in 45 days of disturbances, just about everywhere in France, there was only one death that unquestionably resulted from the fighting (a police superintendent in Lyons). In Paris, only about 2,000 people were hurt—half policemen, half demonstrators; remarkably few, considering the huge numbers of "combatants" involved.

A second trait was the unrepresentative character of the groups involved. The most important ones were the UNEF (*Union nationale d'étudiants français*, or National Union of French Students) and the SNE (sup.) (*Syndicat national de l'enseignement supérieur*, or National Union of Higher Education); in April, the first included perhaps seven or eight per cent of French students, and the second between 20 and 25 per cent of the professors. . . .

A third characteristic was the inflation of vocabulary. From the very start of the disturbances the newspapers enthusiastically encouraged the notion that the nation was experiencing a "revolution." Hundreds of articles opened with the words "From now on, nothing will be the same again, after what has just happened. . . ."

A fourth point: at the height of the fighting no more than a small minority of the students was ever involved. In Paris there were, at the very most, 40,000 demonstrators—out of 160,000 Paris-based students. Now, among the combatants there were young workers (not many, in my opinion) and a good many *blousons noirs*, hooligans, and so on. . . . Let us say that in the whole of France there were only 60,000 students actively mixed up in the events out of a total of 600,000.

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Finally, there is a last characteristic to note: contrary to what the leaders maintained and what certain newspapers spread about, there was no getting-together of workers and students. When the students sought to support the workers by going into the factories, the workers more often than not threw them out. On only two or three occasions did the students manage to get their point across locally. . . .

All in all, as I see it, what happened was in no sense a revolution. There were some disturbances, no more serious than the ones France underwent in 1934, 1936, 1944, and 1947. Contrary to what was proclaimed, the government was never for a moment in danger, and there was no "vacancy of power." But the events should nevertheless not be taken lightly, for they were indications of a profound malaise.

Inevitably, then, the question arises, how did the local revolt of students (a few hundred in March) mushroom into a sort of national crisis, strike terror into a segment of the population, give evidence to the reality of a revolution and suspend life in France for two months, while not a single leader of the masses and not a single revolutionary party sought to seize power?

The Role of Over-Centralization

All this can partially be explained by the passion the French brought to this "sensational" event, and by the considerable influence of the press and radio, which partly "fabricated" events, amplifying the whole thing, multiplying false reports of tragedy, putting fresh heart into the "revolutionaries" with bulletins transmitted direct to the very center of a crowd and relayed on to other crowds. There was a phenomenon of "resonance," or reverberation, in the multitude. The radio stations on France's periphery (Europe No. 1, Radio Luxembourg) played a significant role in provoking and directing the disturbances, putting their equipment at the service of leaders who, in the thick of combat, were able to address their troops all over Paris.

But there was a second element explaining the events: France's extreme degree of centralization. Everything depends on the state and on Paris. When something happens in Paris, all of France is involved. When something seems to attack the state, all of French society disperses: the social fabric seems to disintegrate because the state is threatened. Conversely, every serious problem can only be solved at the center, by the governmental apparatus. . . .

We should now briefly recall certain circumstances which favored the movement, playing the role of proximate causes without being the basic cause:

1. The very rapid growth of the number of students (from 150,000 in 1958 to 600,000 in 1968) and the very much slower growth of opportunities of employment for them (these probably doubled in the same period); hence, a shortage of openings for graduates, and an intense fear of unemployment.

2. The outmoded character of the university (teaching methods, hierarchy, etc.), its extreme centralization (the most insignificant matters must be referred to the Minister, and the deans have no power), its growth (especially in the number of professors), very much slower than that of the number of students (in one faculty the number of professors tripled while the number of students increased tenfold).

3. Finally, the development of "campuses" to which French students are hostile (in general, they consist of fine buildings, but are without a single club, a single movie theater; it adds up to the complete isolation of the students, without any means of distraction, in a "ghetto"). French students like to live in the city and mix with the people. . . .

Let us first enumerate a certain number of the variations. Successively, disturbances were launched in order to:

- * Obtain the right for men and girls to visit one another at night in their room in the Cité Universitaire;
- * Force the dismissal of certain professors from their teaching posts;
- * Force the reopening of the school at Nanterre, which had been shut down;
- * Stop classes at the Sorbonne;
- * Secure the acquittal of students called before the disciplinary council;
- * Protest against the police entering the Sorbonne;
- * Liberate the students who had been arrested;
- * Get the order for the expulsion of Cohn-Bendit annulled;
- * Prevent the examinations from being held;
- * Avenge the drowned student (asserting that the police had killed him).

One watchword succeeded another as soon as the previous one had served its purpose, with a view to stirring up the agitation again when it had slackened.

As for the programs, they were vague and contradictory. There were corporate demands for:

- * A pedagogical reform—of examinations, courses, seminars;

* A curriculum better adapted to our society, to allow students to enter practical life, and find jobs, as soon as they leave the university;

* Autonomy of the universities with respect to the government, and a system of joint management between professors and students to run each department.

This leads us to a second type of demand. Directly political, it consisted of launching a political revolution against the Gaullist regime (a significant slogan: "Ten years is enough").

Challenging Society through the University

The third current is the most important: it was the total challenge of the university in order totally to challenge society. But here, too, there were great divergences. For some students, the university was in the service of capitalist society, supplying it with the engineers, sociologists and psychologists it needed: all the students were conditioned to become the cadres of capitalism, the "exploiters" of the rest. One rejects capitalism, therefore one should reject this university, which ought to become something else—"a place where knowledge is no longer the property of the exploiting elite but the means of transforming social relations, of abolishing the distinction between manual and intellectual work, of realizing the cultural revolution that is inseparable from the economic revolution." What is demanded, then, is a "critical" university, but in the sense of a "Marxist" university (Chinese type). The university would no longer have the function of providing intellectual and scientific education, but only political education.

For other students, what is called into question is not capitalist society but the consumer society—the "great society," the society of mass entertainment, in which "the medium is the message." These critics go much deeper than the others. The university must be critical, but in another sense—developing the student's critical spirit to enable him to rediscover imagination and an active participation, to criticize the society in which he finds himself and be truly independent of it.

We shall come back later to this position-taking. But in both cases the university is attacked in order to overthrow it, destroy it, and transform it into a weapon of war capable of attacking the entire social order. The first step, then, is the establishment of "student power" within the university, with the elimination of the authority of the professors, the obligation of self-criticism, etc. Raymond Aron can well say of this student power that "it is the power of those who are taught over those who earn their living teaching, and that conse-

crates the authority of those who do not know." Thus the purpose of the university is no longer to teach and learn, but to be the place politicized to the maximum in order to overthrow society.

It is easy to see how contradictory these objectives are. Often, it is the selfsame students who demand a more technical education so that they can be assured of a career in society and who refuse to take a place in that society; who demand the democratization of society (everyone having the right to take graduate courses) and the suppression of examinations, but at the time would like the diploma to guarantee them a job; who want to destroy the present state power and at the same time are asking it to allocate more money to the university, and so on. All this attests to the lack of unity among the groups and the incoherence of their motivations.

We should now listen to a certain number of arguments which have frequently been advanced to explain the events. I shall call three of them to mind.

First of all, the French university is accused of every fault—authoritarianism, dogmatism, mandarinism, etc. Now, all this is inexact: to be sure, the university is an old institution which should be brought up to date, but the mandarinism is a legend, as is the dogmatism. As for the sclerosis of the instruction, everything depended on the instructor; it is the human quality and not the institution that was in question. The university's greatest defect was centralization and submission to the government; but that alone could not have motivated these tremendous disturbances.

A second explanation advanced is the action of the *groupuscules* (mini-groups). It is true that innumerable little groups—Trotskyites, anarchists, Castroites, Guevarists, Maoists, *situationnistes*, and so on, all devoted to their respective cause and all able propagandists and tacticians—were remarkably adept at manipulating the mass of students and at coining slogans calculated to set them marching. But it is obvious that these few hundred agitators would not have been able to do anything if there had not been a predisposition to action among the mass of students, a situation of tension and unrest which these propagandists exploited. To postulate the activity of these mini-groups of the extreme left (the Communist party being out of it altogether) as the explanation of the disturbances is convenient for the government and practical for the police, but it is to consider a secondary cause a primary one, and to condemn oneself to not understanding the problem at all.

Finally, a third reason is sometimes invoked: the politico-economic situation created by the Gaullist regime was, it is said, disastrous, with

unemployment, the suppression of democracy, a very slow rise in living standards and authoritarianism (sometimes compared to fascism!). In this view, it was discontent arising from the political system and the economic recession that caused the disturbances. Here, too, it is necessary to set this explanation aside. One might cite the sociologist E. Morin (favorable to the student movement and anti-Gaullist) who recognized, with honesty, that France had never enjoyed such a satisfactory state of things for a very long time. There had been the technical modernization, the social reforms, the economic recovery (while in 1958 the French economy had been in total recession), the establishment of a currency as solid as gold, a more rapid rise in the standards of living than ever before, the success of decolonization in Africa, the liquidation of the Algerian war and its after-effects, and the collapse of the opposition.

"Marxization" after the Fact

The slight increase of unemployment could not really put the regime in danger and provoke the enormous student upheaval. No, it was neither the social and economic situation nor the political regime that was the cause of the disturbances. But once the student movement exploded it was used politically by enemies of the regime, without success by the political parties; but in any case it was very strongly "Marxized," to the extent of demanding the politicization of the university. Altogether, these diverse causes that are so often cited seem not to have been operative. But then, why those disturbances?

Unquestionably, E. Morin points out, there was "the conjunction of two contradictory factors: too little accommodation between the burgeoning production of university graduates and the scarcity of jobs, but also too much accommodation of the humane sciences to a society in which they are becoming auxiliaries of power." If, indeed, we leave aside everything in the general realm of the difficulties of youth—its lack of judgment, its quest for "something else"—in which the student movement shares (to the point that for some people it is simply an aspect of this crisis of youth and of the struggle between the generations), there are plenty of characteristics peculiar to this explosion.

Our first remark has to do with the fact that not all the students, by any means, participated, and that the cleavage did not occur between "those who understood, who became involved," and those who were passive, the "sheep," but rather between categories of students. These categories were of two kinds, the first being between students from relatively well-off backgrounds and poor students. Those who demonstrated violently were of the former category. I was able to

determine this fact personally, and it was confirmed by all my impartial colleagues: scholarship students, sons of workers, young Africans, students earning their living—hardly any of these took part in the disturbances. The disturbances were conducted by the sons of bankers, doctors, lawyers, university professors and high officials (even of government ministers).

The "Weekdays Only" Revolution

In Paris, "those of the 16th arrondissement" participated in great numbers, which explains some curious facts: some details (there was never any trouble during the weekends, because the students were taking it easy in the country or at the seaside) and also, perhaps, certain basic decisions (the workers' rejection of an alliance with the students). The revolution was, for them, a luxury, an escape from boredom and an affirmation of their being "grownups."

But there was another cleavage, too: only a tiny minority of the students of science and medicine demonstrated, as was the case among students of geography and languages. The demonstrators among the students of law, economics and political science were only slightly more numerous. The students who were the *provocateurs*, the driving force behind the disturbances, were those in philosophy, sociology and psychology. In these disciplines, almost all the students were involved.

Now, I believe—and this may seem like a rather dubious interpretation—that this fact has no connection with these students' greater degree of political consciousness or deeper understanding of current problems, but with their unconscious sense of being useless in our society. Scientists and doctors are "in phase" with our society, but philosophers (in France, at least), sociologists and psychologists are the "fifth wheel of the cart"; they are not really of any use, their knowledge is a false science, they have no hold over society and they feel useless. It is therefore not exactly the problem of the shortage of outlets, positions, jobs, but the feeling of uselessness, of the "vanity" of their work, even when they earn a living, thanks to sociology. They are not made for the technical society.

And this brings us to what I believe to be the principal cause: the discordance between the students' global judgment of our society and the instruction they receive. On the first point they share the unease of youth, the hippy orientation. On the one hand, it is the revolt against a society that is rationalized, technicized, efficient, productivist, dedicated to the production and consumption of material goods and having neither values nor meaning. It is a society which does not provide reasons for living, but which is, on the other hand,

very demanding, and which seems "dehumanizing" or "alienating." Young people, whether they understand it or not, whether they know it clearly or not, are ill at ease in this society, not spontaneously adjusted to it, *afraid of entering it*.

Now, the students of philosophy, sociology and psychology are the ones who know this aspect of society best and who most often pass judgment on it. But at the same time the instruction provided in the university schools has no other purpose than to prepare the student to enter this society, to become a participant in and an active element of it. There is thus a cruel opposition between their feelings about this society and the studies they pursue—the more so as the philosopher clearly sees that he will change nothing by his studies, that, on the contrary, he is called upon to justify that society intellectually, while the sociologist is preparing to make the wheels of that society turn more smoothly and the psychologists to help men adjust to that society, which they themselves reject. They consequently accuse the university of being in the service of a society of which they disapprove.

This attitude is not shared to the same degree by chemists and geologists, because they are preparing for precise material functions which do not seem to them to reinforce that society particularly. Besides, their studies do not make them aware of what that society really is.

The student revolt is, then, a profound dispute provoked by a serious malaise: the students do not want to become the trained personnel, the leaders, the bearers of authority and responsibility of this society that they fear and of which they disapprove. When they speak of capitalist society, or of imperialism, they are mistaken in their analysis and in their name-calling. But they come close to exactness when they attack the consumer society and the hierarchical, state-dominated society, whether capitalist or socialist. We are in the presence of the reaction of the human being against a universe that seems to him inhuman.

Finally, the last fundamental aspect of the problem seems to me to be the contradiction between the students' intellectual development and their spiritual emptiness. They share this with all young people. The relativization of morals, the disappearance of traditional values, the absence of Christian faith, the difficulty of conducting genuine human relations with adults (parents), the acceleration of all changes, the invasion of minds by a negative irrationality, the eroticization of all relationships—all young people have suffered the consequences of these developments. But the effect is more serious with the students. What is only felt and/or experienced on the unconscious emotional

level by all young people is lived on the conscious, relatively clear level by the students.

The latter are completely lucid as to the lack of morals, as to the impossibility of having clear references and a meaning to life in our society. They have intellectually accepted all the attacks on the Christian faith. They are aware that they are living in a secularized world. But in the face of this their education is more and more heavily intellectual. They attain an ever higher level of knowledge, of technical competence, of specialization. They are, then, in possession of a more developed intellectual instrument, while their existential "being" is more fragile. They are committed to a more rational, more exact and more precise intellectual path, in the grip of an apparent rationality of the world, society and organization, just when, to them, their life seems absurd, the world empty and society quite without purpose. In other words, they plunge into a "more irrational way of life" just when they are educated to a "more rational thought."

The Keys: Anguish and Insecurity

I believe that this contradiction, a function of the students' situation, is the key to the revolt of the students, which expresses their anguish and insecurity. In this case, in order to respond to it, they hope to free themselves from the iron framework of rationality, and from alienation, by way of "action for action's sake" (one of the slogans of the disturbances was, "it is through action that we will discover what we must do"), or by way of eroticism. They do not realize that these orientations simply constitute an acceptance of the very things that plunged them into the catastrophe. It is obvious that the Eros of Marcuse is no answer to the situation. On the contrary! But it is this that gave the disturbances of May not so much a revolutionary character as a festive one (in the sociologists' sense), of a village fair, of a carnival, with the compensatory delirium that that implies and the simplicity of relationships it creates, all taboos being abruptly transgressed. And it is certainly this which explains, moreover, the contradictory and incoherent character of the demands, as we have shown they were. Certain demands concern the intellectual preparation and others the spiritual emptiness.

It is, finally, this situation that explains the lack of result of these disturbances. For there was no revolution, neither political, nor economic, nor social. Contrary to what certain people have written, nothing has changed. The problem posed is at the very heart of the relationship between man and modern society; it cannot be solved by mob activity and by demands. The students will certainly be able to continue to keep the university from functioning and the students in an

uproar; they will accomplish nothing by this, and will not reach the root of the evil they sense without having fully analyzed.

CHRONOLOGY

- NOVEMBER 1967. Revolt of students at the University of Nanterre for the right of men and girls to visit each other freely at night in their quarters.
- DECEMBER 1967. Strike of 10,000 students for improved working conditions.
- FEBRUARY 1968. Strike of Nanterre students against the Vietnam war.
- FEBRUARY. Demonstration of solidarity with students threatened with expulsion; boycotting of classes by a small minority; abrogation of "home rule" in the students' quarters.
- MARCH. Nanterre students boycott examinations; violent demonstrations; arrest of "anti-imperialist" students; protest meeting and invasion of professors' premises; foundation of the "March 22 Movement."
- APRIL. Occupation by about 1,000 students of some Nanterre buildings; convocation of student extremists before the university's disciplinary council; a great many professors find it impossible to conduct classes.
- MAY 2. Closing of the *Faculté des lettres* (Liberal Arts School) of Nanterre.
- MAY 3. Student meeting at the Sorbonne to protest against this last measure; the Sorbonne is occupied by the "March 22 Movement," driven out of Nanterre; the dean of the Sorbonne summons the police, who evacuate the school; mass meeting in the Latin Quarter.
- MAY 6. Arrest and conviction of students; first big demonstration (10,000 participants).
- MAY 7-9. Appeal of the students to the workers; the Communist party condemns the student movement (on the ground that it is "leftist"); Nanterre is reopened, but the Sorbonne remains closed.
- MAY 10. Breakdown of negotiations between the Minister of Education and the students; a rising in the Latin Quarter to liberate the arrested students; barricades and fighting in the streets.
- MAY 11. The unions announce a 24-hour general strike; the prime minister returns from a trip and announces concessions.
- MAY 13. General strike; parade of 300,000 people (one million, according to the organizers); occupation of the Sorbonne.
- MAY 15. First of the occupations of factories; occupation of the National Theatre of the Odéon.
- MAY 18. The President of the Republic returns from Romania; strikes of the SNCF (national railway), PTT (Post Office, including telephone and telegraph systems), etc.
- MAY 20. The parliamentary Left calls for the resignation of the government and for general elections; the CGT (*Confédération générale de travail*,

- France's largest bloc of trade unions, Communist-dominated) states that it does not want an insurrection; Cohn-Bendit (the leader of the March 22 Movement) is banned from French territory.
- MAY 22. Demonstrations for Cohn-Bendit's return; the CGT rejects the bid for solidarity of the UNEF (*Union nationale d'étudiants français*, the principal students' union).
- MAY 23. First student-worker demonstrations.
- MAY 24. Speech by the President of the Republic announcing a referendum; demonstrations, meetings, barricadings, street fights continue.
- MAY 26. Agreement (known as the Agreement of Grenelle) between the union men and the government (salary hikes, etc.)
- MAY 27. Second week of strikes: ten million strikers: the Agreement of Grenelle is rejected by the rank-and-file union men; important meeting between the UNEF and the CFDT.
- MAY 28. M. (François) Mitterrand a candidate for the presidency of the Republic; Cohn-Bendit returns clandestinely; failure of a meeting of "revolutionary" leaders convened to regroup the multiple movements.
- MAY 29. The president goes to Germany to assure himself of the loyalty of the French soldiers stationed there.
- MAY 30. The president's speech: dissolution of the National Assembly, announcement of elections; demonstration in support of the president (on the Champs Elysées; between 500,000 and one million people).
- MAY 31. The unions begin to accept the Agreement of Grenelle; a fire in the Sorbonne; Gaullist demonstrations in the provinces.
- JUNE 1. Beginnings of the resumption of work.
- JUNE 3. Resumption of work widespread.
- JUNE 7. The students attempt to provoke the workers to fight (at a Renault plant).
- JUNE 10. A student in a UNEF demonstration accidentally drowns; the students call it a police murder; enormous demonstrations in the Latin Quarter—battles, barricades.
- JUNE 11. The Communist party again condemns the revolutionary student groups; another night of rioting.
- JUNE 13. The Communist party and the CGT regain control of the workers; the government bans the revolutionary students' associations.
- JUNE 15. A general resumption of work; one by one, the university buildings are abandoned by the students who had occupied them.
- JUNE 17-20. The hardcore Sorbonne groups (known as *les Katangais*, the Katangans) of the Odéon and the *Faculté Censier* of Paris leave these buildings, under duress or of their own volition.
- JUNE 20-30. Attempts to recommence the disturbances, which fail; the population hostile to the students; the election gives the Gaullist party a majority.

(C) AN IMPOSSIBLE REVOLUTION

(Translated by George Armstrong Kelly)

MAURICE DUVERGER

Before May 1968 revolution was thought impossible in very industrialized countries. It was said that the general elevation of the standard of living had given the workers bourgeois traits and had mitigated the violence of class struggle. It was thought that if you brutally upset a very complicated and fragile system of production and exchange, it would remain disorganized for a long time and incur a deep economic recession. It was further thought that the masses of people had become more or less aware of this and would thus refuse to sacrifice their present welfare, even a mediocre one, to the fleeting glimpse of future improvement won at the price of a long period of troubles and restrictions.

These arguments were not only the property of the West. People's China's second-in-command, Marshal Lin Piao, implicitly agreed. He thought that from now on world revolution would be waged by underdeveloped countries, and that these rural areas of the world would progressively encroach on the industrial nations, just as Chinese communism, first widespread in the countryside, had later conquered the cities. Soviet and East European revisionism were a kind of illustration of the revolutionary incapacity of overdeveloped societies. The prestige of Mao, Castro, and "Che" Guevara in extreme leftist circles of the West resulted from this general analysis.

Today some see things in a different light. Based on the French experience of May 1968, they are building a new theory of the revolutionary conquest of power in industrial societies. According to this theory, the initial impulse is provided by the youth, less integrated in the existing order than their elders, even those of the working class. In their midst the students play the role of an avant-garde. Their

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