

The French Communist Party

versus the Students

Revolutionary Politics in May–June 1968

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As the PCF militant moves through his political world, one of the assumptions that guides his journey is that all that is bourgeois is bad, and all that is proletarian is good. His perceptions are also guided by another dichotomous construct: the opposition of spontaneity to consciousness. Undirected, spontaneous political action is invariably ineffective; while conscious and purposeful political action is invariably effective.

Like the bourgeois/proletarian construct, the consciousness/spontaneity formula finds its root in the original theories of Marx and Lenin. Marx forcefully condemned the anarchism of Bakunin, and Lenin polemicized endlessly against the narodniks and the ultra-leftists. The May revolution can be interpreted as another in this series of ideological confrontations. The student revolutionaries were, for the most part, champions of Luxemburgist spontaneity. The PCF, on the other hand, was a forceful advocate of conscious, directed, and, above all else, *organized* political action.

THE LOGIC OF LENINISM

In the structure of Leninist thought, the category of "consciousness" is intimately related to the category of "organization." The vanguard party is an organization of professional revolutionaries—a professional being one who engages in political activity full time and thereby acquires a firm grasp of the dynamics of the revolutionary process. He is "conscious" in the sense that he is an "expert."

Organization provides the institutional setting in which professional consciousness can develop. The Party supports and trains full-time activists. But it also provides the institutional structures through which professionalism is put into practice. Through the Party, the expert makes tactical and strategic decisions for the working class.

The development of an organization of conscious professionals was necessitated largely by the oppressive nature of the Tsarist state. The Russian police were technocrats of repression; if the Communists were to deal successfully with this enemy, they had to become technocrats of revolution. In the words of Lenin:

One cannot help but to compare this kind of warfare (spontaneous uprisings) with that conducted by a mob of peasants armed with clubs against modern troops.¹

The modern troops of the Tsar could be defeated only by the modern troops of the Bolshevik vanguard. Amateur activists invariably ended up in Siberia. "Ten wise men," warned Lenin, "are harder to catch than ten fools."²

But Lenin was careful to point out that the vanguard fulfills not only a technocratic function but also an educational one. It awakens true consciousness among the masses; it teaches the proletariat the principles of scientific socialism. For "theory becomes a social force once it is grasped by the masses."³

On his own, the worker develops an "instinctive combativeness" and a "primitive awareness of the necessity for collective action."⁴ But he is unable to spontaneously achieve a comprehension of the structure of the capitalist economy, its internal contradictions, and its relationship with the ideological and political superstructures. The proletariat is thus incapable of grasping the logical necessity for a thoroughgoing revolution.

Therefore, the vanguard must make the worker conscious of both his historical mission and the concrete realities of his present situation. The proletariat must be made aware of the fact that it is the "universal class." It must come to understand that its particular liberation depends upon the liberation and reconstruction of society as a whole. The vanguard must translate this theoretical principle into concrete terms. The best way to accomplish this is to help the proletariat play a leading role in the struggles of all oppressed groups. By playing such a role, the worker transcends his narrow economic concerns and achieves a broad political consciousness.

What does "the workers accumulating forces for the struggle" mean? Is it not obvious that it means the political training of the workers by revealing to them all aspects of our despicable autocracy?⁵

At this point in Lenin's argument, a tension emerges between his strategic goals and the concrete conditions of Russian society. On

the one hand, the Party must educate the proletariat and coordinate its activities with those of all oppressed groups; the revolution must be a mass movement of vast dimensions. On the other hand, the realities of autocracy demand that the Party be an elite vanguard composed of professional actors.

The tension is resolved by fusing mass organizations to the vanguard party. All workers can join the trade unions; and all students can join the youth movement. But only full-time experts can staff the Party itself.

The mass organizations are placed in a position of complete subordination to the Party. For "broad democracy in the Party organization amidst the gloom of autocracy and the domination of the gendarmes is nothing more than a useless and harmful toy."⁶ In Lenin's view, "a handful of revolutionaries (should) appoint bodies of leaders for each town district, for each factory district, and for each educational district."⁷

The organizations become transmission belts for the commands of the elite. By manipulating these belts, the vanguard engages the masses in political action that (1) weakens and demoralizes the ruling class; and (2) raises the level of proletarian consciousness.

Lenin's logic is, therefore, an attempt to adapt the universal strategic precepts of Marxism to a particular national setting. Again and again, Lenin stresses the exigencies generated by the Russian autocracy. Professionalism, hierarchy, and the subordination of lower bodies to higher ones—all these Bolshevik principles are responses to the specific conditions of a single context.

Rosa Luxemburg saw this quite clearly. "What is in order," she said, "is to distinguish the essential from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks."⁸ She argued that the Leninists err when they try to raise the particular to the level of the universal.

... The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics.⁹

THE CULT OF ORGANIZATION

It could be argued that the PCF has, in the words of Luxemburg, mistaken the "excrescences" of Leninism for its "essence." The ideology of Leninism attaches strong, positive, affective dimensions to centralized organization, hierarchical discipline, and professional consciousness; yet it seems incapable of justifying its commitment to these qualities with Leninist logic.

The Party's condemnation of spontaneity and democracy cannot rest on the threat of autocratic repression. Even France under de Gaulle cannot be seriously compared to Tsarist Russia. Nor does a truly Leninist relationship exist between the PCF and its mass organizations. It is impossible to describe the Party as an elite vanguard. On the contrary, almost anyone can join; by its own admission, only a quarter of its 400,000 members can be classified as cadres.¹⁰

Moreover, the Party cannot claim to fulfill the same educational function as Lenin's vanguard. Unlike the Russian working class of the late nineteenth century, the French proletariat is not a minority group composed primarily of displaced peasants. As has been pointed out, Waldeck Rochet, in *Chemins de l'avenir*, claims that the French worker has internalized the teachings of Marx and Lenin and that, consequently, the ideology of the proletariat is now scientific. In light of this assertion, the Party's condemnation of spontaneous consciousness seems contradictory.

It would therefore appear that the Party has retained the affective structure of Lenin's theory but has abandoned its evaluative or logical structure. When Rochet defends the organizational forms of the PCF, he does not employ the dialectical reasoning of *What Is To Be Done?* but instead appeals to simple doctrinal formulas. "The organization of our Party is based on democratic centralism which . . . assures the conditions for unity and effectiveness."¹¹ Discipline and hierarchy are said to be the necessary prerequisites of proletarian unity, which, in turn, is the necessary prerequisite of proletarian strength.

As far as we're concerned it has been demonstrated that a party which claims to be proletarian, but which has no unity of action

and in which everyone, on his own, does everything he pleases, cannot direct the working class or the popular masses and lead them to victory.¹²

The Party's centralism is no longer a resolution of contradictions between the universal and the particular or between strategic imperatives and national conditions. Instead, it is stated as a basic postulate—as an a priori, deductive principle. The PCF has universalized Lenin's position. As Gorz, Togliatti, and others have suggested, it has taken an organizational structure designed for an underdeveloped, despotic state and imposed it upon a Western industrial democracy.¹³

This universalization is often blamed on the Communist International (Comintern). In 1921 each party had to pledge to observe twenty-one "conditions" before it could be granted admission. The fourth condition demanded that foreign parties emulate the internal organizational structure of the CPSU(b).

Parties belonging to the Communist International must be built up on the principle of democratic centralism. At the present time of acute civil war, the Communist Party will only be able to fully do its duty when it is organized in the most centralized manner, if it has an iron discipline, bordering on military discipline, and if the Party center is a powerful, authoritative organ with wide powers, possessing the general trust of the Party membership.¹⁴

During the first several years of the Comintern's existence, however, this condition was often ignored or, at most, was generally enforced with flexibility. Only with the rise of Stalin did the tendency to universalize bolshevism become absolute. Then, an attempt was made to make all Communist parties follow the conditions to the letter.

This development can be partially traced to the interactions between the bureaucratization of the Soviet party and the power struggle at its summit. After the revolution, the CPSU(b) had to transform itself from a small, compact detachment of revolutionary intellectuals into an army of administrative functionaries. The apparatchiki became Russia's new ruling class and, hence, the principal power base in Soviet politics.

Stalin set about to capture this base. Consequently, the interpretation of Marxism-Leninism which he set forth was designed to appeal primarily to the bureaucratic mentality of the new elite. As Isaac Deutscher and others have pointed out, Stalinism became the ideology of the emerging state and party apparatuses.¹⁵ Those aspects of Marxism-Leninism that conformed with the attitudes and interests of the bureaucracies were retained and emphasized; and those which conflicted were ignored.

Many of the latter were championed by Leon Trotsky. Trotsky tried to use ideological weapons to discredit the apparatus and thus undermine the basis of his opponents' power. Consequently, his polemics were full of violent attacks on the abuses of bureaucratization. The principal theme of a series of articles and pamphlets published in 1923, later collected in the *New Course*, was the necessity to find some means of checking the growing power of the new administrative organizations.¹⁶

Stalin responded by promoting a cult of organization. While the Trotskyists condemned "bureaucratism," the Stalinists tirelessly preached its virtues. The *Short Course in the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)* (1938) eventually became the bible of this cult. In it the glories of organization are repeated ad infinitum.

The Party is not only the vanguard, the class consciousness detachment of the working class, but also an *organized* detachment of the working class, with its own discipline, which is binding on its members. Hence Party members must be members of some *organization* of the Party. If the Party were not an *organized* detachment of the class, not a system of *organization*, but a mere agglomeration of persons who declare themselves to be party members, but do not belong to any party *organization*, and therefore are not *organized*, hence not obliged to obey Party decisions, the Party would never have a united will, it could never achieve the united action of its members, and consequently it would be unable to direct the struggle of the working class. The Party can lead the practical struggle of the working class and direct it towards one aim only if all its members are *organized* in

one common detachment, welded together by unity of will, unity of action and unity of discipline.¹⁷

Like the cult of organization, the theory of building socialism in one country seems to have been designed to win the hearts and minds of the functionaries and apparatchiki. By 1925 most regional Party secretaries probably had little interest in the prospect of world revolution. For eight years the Communist leaders had been confidently predicting imminent upheavals in the West, but their prophecies had remained unfulfilled. Trotsky's internationalism must have appeared wishful and utopian to the provincial bureaucrat. Socialism in one country, on the other hand, had a reassuringly practical and hard-headed sound. In addition, Stalin's theory appealed to the administrator's immediate concerns, his narrow, localistic outlook, and his latent sense of national pride.

Acceptance of the "one country" concept had profound implications on the Communist parties abroad. In 1924 Stalin declared that world capitalism was experiencing a period of "temporary stabilization." During this phase, revolutionary projects would prove futile. Hence, the Communist parties of the West should strive to consolidate their organizational strength. "The process of the definitive crystalization of the true Bolshevik parties in the West has begun; it constitutes the basis for the future revolution in Europe."¹⁸

As a result the PCF was ordered to "bolshelize" its organization. The French Party eagerly embraced certain aspects of this program. It seemed to find the principle of bureaucratic centralism particularly appealing. The "center" immediately began to set down intricate operational codes to govern the behavior of the "base." On December 31, 1924, the leadership of the PCF issued a detailed statement which prescribed the structure, composition, duties, and procedure of each cell. According to Gérard Walter, "The instructions furnished by this text offer a perfect model of bureaucratic minutiae, such as the most far-sighted, the most experienced administration could not surpass."¹⁹

Even the Comintern was disconcerted by the PCF's extreme predilection for bureaucratic uniformity. Giorgio Rovida reports that

the executive committee attacked the "sectarian mentality of the leadership, for whom bolshevization meant, in short, the mechanical initiation of executive orders."²⁰

Nevertheless, this organizational rigidity persisted. In 1940 the PCF central committee issued a "Plan d'organisation et de travail d'un cellule." The leadership told the cells how to occupy literally every minute of their meetings.*

A number of factors seem to have contributed to the French Party's enthusiasm for the cult of organization. First, the power struggle in the Soviet Union was accompanied by parallel struggles in the PCF. While Stalin fought Trotsky, Thorez and his colleagues fought Alfred Rosmer and Boris Souvarine. A new generation of working-class organization men struggled against both the bourgeois intellectuals and the old revolutionaries who had founded the Party. The former advocated the Stalinist virtues of organization and centralism; the latter defended the principles of Trotskyism, party democracy, and anarcho-syndicalism.

The cult emerged in the course of these early leadership battles, and it took root as the new organizational elite established itself. It is now the core of the Party's ideology. At the present time, the PCF has an extensive permanent staff. Marchais and Rochet preside over a veritable empire of organizations. They administer trade unions; numerous clubs and associations; newspapers, reviews, and journals; travel agencies; municipal governments; summer camps; and import-export companies. The Party has a reported income of 23,295,000 francs and thousands of full-time, paid employees.²¹

According to the PCF, the working class is the "heart of the nation"; one might extend this statement to read: "The functionariat is the heart of the Party." The present leaders have almost all been career apparatchiki. Annie Kriegel argues that the growing Party apparatus has gradually transformed itself from a tool into an end in itself: "Thus weighted down, the Party machine, while functioning very correctly, risks functioning increasingly for its own sake."²²

By sanctifying the concepts of organization and professionalism the PCF sanctifies its massive functionariat; its bureaucratic routines

*See the excerpt from the "Plan d'organisation" in the appendix to this chapter.

are transformed into holy *rites*. This process also strengthens the legitimacy of the present leaders, most of whom are organization men.

This zealous commitment to the concepts of hierarchy and centralism can also be accounted for by an understanding of the French national character as it has been described by Blancard, Wylie, Pitts, Crozier, and others.²³ The French are said to have a tendency to convert authority into sets of impersonal rules. Whenever possible, the need for personal leadership is eliminated through the creation of rigid operational codes. Organizations are structured so that residual authority is allocated in such a manner that it is kept at a safe distance from those affected. As Crozier says:

Face-to-face dependence relationships are, indeed, perceived as difficult to bear in the French cultural setting. Yet the prevailing view of authority is still that of universalism and absolutism; it continues to retain something of the seventeenth-century's political theory, with its mixture of rationality and *bon plaisir*. The two attitudes are contradictory. However, they can be reconciled in a *bureaucratic* system, since *impersonal rules* and *centralization* make it possible to reconcile an absolutist conception of authority and the elimination of most direct dependence relationships.²⁴

A number of social mechanisms serve to perpetuate and reinforce these traditional attitudes. According to Jesse Pitts, the source of the problem lies in the "child's" relationship to his "parents."

Within the nuclear family the parents try to be omnipresent and undisputed. The child is allowed little initiative—officially. The proper forms of behavior, the *principles*, exist once and for all, and the parents require perfect performance before the child is allowed to make his own decisions.²⁵

The effects of the family socialization experience are two-fold. First, the child develops both a dread of authority and a yearning for independence. Second, he identifies "proper conduct" with certain set, absolute principles.

If the analyses of Métraux and Mead are correct, the French school system probably reinforces these attitudes. French education, they

argue, is "characterized by a tight control and a repression of movement and physical aggression; a great pressure of the outside world with shaming and nagging and a reliance on oral aggression as a way of relief."²⁶ In both the primary school and the lycée, personal dependence relationships are restrictive and often unpleasant. Pitts agrees: "In school the French child gets more of what he has gotten at home."²⁷ Crozier also points out that French education puts an inordinate stress on universal norms and values.

The emphasis of French education on principles and on the deductive aspects of science, the place it gives to subject matters requiring precision and clarity, and the reluctance it shows for controversial or ambiguous problems have been noticed by many French and foreign observers.²⁸

We might tentatively conclude that the PCF ardently embraced the Bolshevik organizational structure because it was culturally predisposed to do so. The impact of both primary and secondary socialization mechanisms lead many French Communists to passively accept a position in a stratified hierarchy in which power is concentrated in a distant center and operations are guided by clear and precise principles, regulations, and directives. It could therefore be argued that the organizational patterns of the PCF are as French as the Code Napoléon.*

When Lenin accepted centralism and organizational hierarchy, he was consciously and creatively responding to environmental demands; when the French Party accepted them, it was unconsciously submitting to an environmental demand—that is, the force of "national culture."

In summary, the ideology of the PCF contains two central dichotomies: "organization/anarchy" and "consciousness/spontaneity." The first term in each of these dichotomies is endowed with strong,

*Any generalization about "national culture" must remain tentative until formulated into workable hypotheses and subjected to empirical tests. The theories of Pitts and Crozier have not yet been, in any sense, "proven." Consequently, what has been outlined above is no more than a *possible* relationship between organizational ideology and national attitudes.

positive affective dimensions. This development seems to have been the product of a number of factors: the forces of Leninist tradition, cultural predispositions of the French people, and, last but not least, the particularistic interests of the "functionariat"—the hegemonic faction within the Party.

THE CULT OF SPONTANEITY

When Cohn-Bendit attacked the bureaucratization of the PCF, Rochet responded by saying: "In fact, it is a question of old theories from the beginning of the century, which the revolutionary workers' movement has been combatting and defeating for a long time."²⁹ Rochet was correct. Cohn-Bendit was essentially a "Luxemburgist." His debate with the Party was in many respects a repeat of the Lenin-Luxemburg debate which was carried out in the pages of *Iskra* in 1903.*

In *Obsolete Communism* (1968), Cohn-Bendit quotes Luxemburg approvingly. "The reason why spontaneity is important for the struggle of the Russian masses is not that the Russian proletariat is 'uneducated,' but rather that the revolution cannot be run by schoolmasters."³⁰ The student radicals had no intention of letting PCF schoolmasters lead them in their struggle against their university schoolmasters.

Cohn-Bendit continually stressed that vanguards and hierarchies are incompatible with the phenomenon of revolution. In the middle of May he told Sartre that "our action has proven that spontaneity retains its place in the social movement. . . . No vanguard, not the UEC, the JCR or the M-L, has succeeded in assuming the leadership of the movement."³¹

This argument rests on the assumption that organization naturally nurtures conservatism. Centralized structures imply the existence of an elite; elites tend to assiduously protect whatever power they have managed to accumulate. Since the PCF has succeeded in inserting itself into the French parliamentary system, its elite now tries to preserve the power and influence the Party has thereby gained.

*See Helmut Gruber, *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* (Greenwich, 1957), for the relevant documents and a cogent commentary on the 1903 controversy.

As a result, the PCF is reluctant to abandon electoral tactics—even when new conditions seem to call for new approaches. As Luxemburg puts it: "The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role."³² As the Party gains strength, "the leaders transform it at the same time into a kind of bastion which holds up advance on a wider scale." The Party adjusts to life in a parliamentary regime, and, consequently, "electoral tactics come to be regarded as the immutable and specific tactics of socialist activity."³³

The position of Cohn-Bendit is almost identical to Luxemburg's. The PCF, he argues, is a traditional bureaucratic hierarchy. It has managed to accumulate a share of the power in the existing social system. It has deputies in parliament, its mayors administer cities, and it is now in the process of "trying to wrest a seat on the very centers of economic power, on the boards of the increasingly important state industries."³⁴ As a result, the PCF no longer wants to revolutionize the system. On the contrary, its elite desires to preserve the system so that it might increase Party power *within* it. The PCF's revolutionary verbiage is therefore belied by its electoral opportunism, thus creating "an unsavory mixture of theoretical rectitude and electoral compromise."³⁵

Luxemburg and Cohn-Bendit also present another argument against Leninism. They contend that the unorganized masses tend to be far more creative than the organizational elites. According to Luxemburg, "the ultra-centralism asked by Lenin is full of the sterile spirit of the overseer. It is not a positive and creative spirit." The masses are the source of true, revolutionary creativity. "But what has been the experience of the Russian socialist movement up to now? . . . The most important and most fruitful changes in its tactics during the last years . . . have been the spontaneous products of the movement in ferment."³⁶ In 1898, for example, workers "spontaneously" invented the general strike. And in 1901 students "spontaneously" invented the massive street demonstration.

Bolshevism stifles this innate "creativity." Lenin points out that factory workers often make the best Communists since they have been subjected to the iron discipline of the industrial plant. The worker knows how to obey; he knows how to unquestioningly carry out orders. Instead of trying to overcome this submissive attitude,

Lenin exploits it for it facilitates the vanguard's manipulative projects.

But Luxemburg argues that a strategy based on manipulation is fundamentally unsound. All Marxists realize that tactics must be adjusted to prevailing conditions. Luxemburg therefore argues that tactics are best selected by the workers in each factory and the students at each university. They possess an intimate and intuitive grasp of the nature of their own environments. The center is too remote. When a paramilitary command lays down universal regulations, it usually ends up imposing inappropriate solutions on unfamiliar terrains. The masses must be allowed to creatively respond to the particular conditions of their own milieus.

It is clear that Cohn-Bendit shares this belief in the spontaneous creativity of the masses. He argues that the preconceived theories of the professionals are invariably inferior to the dynamic theories that emerge from the political action of the masses. Ideas do not precede practice; practice produces ideas.³⁷

Cohn-Bendit constantly emphasizes that control and direction are totally hostile to mass creativity. In his interview with Sartre, Cohn-Bendit asserted: "The strength of our movement is precisely that it rests on an uncontrollable spontaneity."³⁸ In *Obsolete Communism* he states that "if a revolution is to succeed, *no form of organization whatsoever* must be allowed to dam its spontaneous flow."³⁹ The masses can attain power only through free, unorganized, and unplanned collective action.

When the PCF viewed Cohn-Bendit's criticism, they saw heresy and scandal. In the words of Rochet, they heard "old themes from the beginning of the century," which the proletariat had "struggled against and vanquished." Cohn-Bendit's polemics were viewed as heretical attacks on Lenin's sacred texts—texts whose "holy" character was reinforced by national character and bureaucratic interests.

The reaction of the Party might have been considerably less hostile had Cohn-Bendit been merely an isolated intellectual. But "Danny the Red" (as he was called) was unquestionably the dominant personality of the May revolution. Despite his attacks on leadership and hero worship, he had innumerable disciples. His anarchism apparently struck a responsive chord among the great mass of the students.

UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE

To understand why the students were attracted to the Luxemburgist attitudes, one must examine the structure of the university community.

By way of introduction to this topic, we know that Lenin recognized that factory conditions prepare the worker for the iron discipline of the Bolshevik party. The Leninist model seems perfectly adapted to the psychological terrain of the industrial plant. It fully exploits the proletariat's submissive mentality.

At first glance, there appear to be certain similarities between the factory and the college campus. As Seymour Martin Lipset points out, both aggregate and socialize a great mass of individuals.

There are factors inherent in the ecological structure of universities that facilitate collective action. Like a vast factory, a large campus brings together great numbers of people in similar life situations, in close proximity to one another, who can acquire a sense of solidarity and wield real power.⁴⁰

But Lipset's analogy is somewhat misleading. The lecture hall and the assembly line tend to create radically different attitudes toward organization and discipline. Industrial labor is *social activity*. It is invariably a cooperative venture. The individual proletarian produces nothing; the finished commodity is the product of a collective laborer. But study is purely an *egoistic activity*. The university in itself produces nothing; it is merely a collection of disparate individuals, each of whom is engaged in an attempt to educate himself.

The two environments produce antithetical life-rhythms. The workers all arrive at the factory at eight; they work until noon; they lunch together; they work for four more hours; then they all go home. The nature of the work process imposes a uniform routine. But each student is free to establish his own schedule and his own rhythm. The Parisian student may or may not attend one or two hours of lectures each day at the Sorbonne. Aside from that, he is totally free. He can study in the library from eight to twelve in the morning, or in a café from eight to twelve at night. As Bourdieu and Passeron point out: "To experience life as a student, is first and perhaps foremost, to feel

free to go to the movies whenever one wants to and consequently, never on Sunday, like everyone else."⁴¹

Studying in itself need never be a cooperative endeavor. Nevertheless, a "community of scholars" can be artificially created, as at Harvard, Oxford, or Cambridge. But Paris possesses few such communities. Only a small minority live in official university dwellings (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Type of Living Quarters of Parisian Students (42)*

	With parents	Independent lodgings	University dormitories
Boys	34%	52%	14%
Girls	45%	43%	11%

There is no campus. Laboratories, lecture halls, and student restaurants are dispersed throughout the city. The university itself provides the student with few opportunities to meet his comrades. Most student interaction occurs on a random and informal basis—in the Latin Quarter's numerous cafés, bookstores, and restaurants.

The heterogeneous nature of the student community also contributes to its atomization. Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds. As the PCF points out, they form a highly differentiated strata—in contrast to the relatively homogeneous proletariat (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Social Origins of French Students (43)*

Salaried farm workers	1,208	.6%
Farmers	11,791	5.6%
Service personnel	1,854	.9%
Blue-collar workers	13,661	6.4%
White-collar workers	16,669	7.9%
Industrial and commercial executives	37,535	17.7%
Middle-level management	37,921	17.8%
Liberal professions and upper-level management	60,374	28.5%

Table 2 (cont.)

Property owners, without professions	14,769	7.6%
Others	16,097	7.6%
Total	211,879	100%

Not only are the students' backgrounds varied and dissimilar, but their fields of concentration vary widely. And in Paris, law, medical, history, and literature students have little formal interaction. One's liberal education is obtained at the lycée; the university student immediately specializes. Thus, sociology students rarely take history of art courses. In addition, there is no sense of common destiny among Parisian students. The undergraduates at Harvard or Oxford all have a reasonably good chance of gaining admission to the ruling strata. Many will become leading figures in the worlds of business, government, and the arts. But French students face widely dissimilar futures. Members of the Grandes Ecoles will no doubt enter the power elite, but many law students will end up as government clerks. Likewise, students in the science faculties are likely to spend the rest of their lives as salaried technicians.

In short, neither the social roots of the students, nor their present routines, nor their future possibilities provide them with any concrete basis for a sense of collective identity.

It would be a mistake to characterize the French university as a totally atomized mass society. Over one-third of the students live with their parents and are, to a greater or lesser extent, still integrated in the primary family group. The rest are saved from isolation and anomie by a proliferation of formal and informal secondary groups. Fifty-seven percent of the students under twenty-one are members of a student union; 15 percent are members of political organizations.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, there are indications that the university community—like French society as a whole—is relatively resistant to the formation of stable, cohesive secondary associations. Sociometric studies indicate that, in any given classroom, personal exchanges outside the lecture hall—and even the simple knowledge of names—are likely to be extremely rare.⁴⁵

In addition, those who attempt to organize collective activities invariably encounter stubborn obstacles. The authors of *Les Héritiers* mention that:

Each year philosophy students from the liberal arts colleges in the provinces try to organize collective activities; they fail regularly, doubtless because they come up against the aristocratic individualism of the "philosopher."⁴⁶

Since similar difficulties also occur in other university departments, however, it would probably be a mistake to place inordinate stress on the aristocratic individualism of philosophy students.

One would conclude that Leninism does not provide particularly useful guidelines to campus mobilization; in the absence of a collective consciousness and in light of a general resistance to discipline, strategies based on *control, organization, and manipulation* are difficult to implement.

THE DELINQUENT COMMUNITY

It has been argued that the authoritarian structure of the French family tends to produce an individualistic reaction and a subsequent dislike of collective activities.

If this thesis is valid, it would seem to bear particular relevance to the members of the university community. For the Parisian student, who lives either in a dormitory or on his own, has finally managed to escape the despotism of parental authority. After 18 years of stifling, face-to-face, dependence relationships, he is finally free. It is perfectly natural that he should be somewhat jealous of his newly won independence; it is understandable that he might be reluctant to join a highly organized secondary group, for fear that the radical freedom of student life might thereby be compromised.

The theories of Jesse Pitts and Michel Crozier can also be used to provide additional explanations for the generally unstable character of student groups. According to Pitts, both the French family and the French school tend to foster a distinct type of peer-group interaction, which he calls the "delinquent community." This community is characterized by transience, instability, and a general aura of ille-

gitimacy. Within the nuclear family the parents try to be omnipresent and undisputed. But the child learns that he can gain "evasion and relief" through covert relationships with members of the extended family. "These relatives offer the child preferential treatment [in which] he can find oases of relaxation and security from the exacting pressures, particularly those of his father." But these liaisons are illegitimate because they bypass the "doctrinaire-hierarchical values upon which parental authority is based."⁴⁷

In the primary school and in the lycée, peer-group interaction tends to assume a similar character. The teacher's authority is equally "doctrinaire" and "hierarchical." As a general rule, he is aloof, impartial, and exacting—"an Olympian diety." Pitts contends that the students resist the teacher's tyranny by forming semi-clandestine alliances.

Every student as a student has to recognize the legitimacy of the teacher's demands in homework and formal instruction. On the other hand, the teacher's classroom administrative authority will not be taken for granted. On the contrary, the teachers will find the peer group engaging in a continual battle against him, a battle in which the best he can get is a truce; and he gets it by his capacity to punish—without pity and without argument.⁴⁸

These mischievous alliances strive to subvert the teacher's authority. The administration is perfectly aware of this situation and "attempts to exercise the most rigid supervision of student groups at all times." Consequently, the group is neither stable nor enduring. The loyalty of its members is tenuous; for the group operates above all else as an organization which promotes the pleasure and liberty of the individual. As a result, "the peer group understands that the member cannot prejudice his interest position for the sake of the group, since the *raison d'être* of the group is to protect his interest position."⁴⁹ In addition, since the group systematically debunks *all* official morality, it is hardly in a position to uphold the "moral necessity" of suffering in the group's interest. Competition provides another disintegrative force. As a general rule, only the top 50-60 percent of a lycée class wins their baccalaureates. A tendency there-

fore arises to view "the other" as a threat to one's own success. This hardly encourages the development of group solidarity.

The autocratic teacher faces an essentially atomized student community. The formation of stable cliques is thwarted by both external and internal pressures. The students can evade this situation only through collective rebellion. As Crozier says: "The children can resist the strong pressures of the system only by resorting to an implicit negative solidarity and occasional revolts—the famous *chahuts*."⁵⁰

From time to time, classes are disrupted by spontaneous uproars. Discipline is temporarily shattered and the teacher completely loses control. As Victor Brombert describes it, "classes are interrupted by the launching of paper airplanes, the explosion of stink bombs; or the anonymous, collective humming which drowns [the teacher's] voice under the weight of Russian choir effects."⁵¹ But soon the revolt is suppressed and order is restored. The chief culprits are mercilessly punished, and the solidarity of the group disintegrates.

Thus, when revolt occurs in the lyc ee, it is definitely not of a Leninist variety. On the contrary, it is decidedly Luxemburgian—that is, spontaneous, anarchic, and undirected.

THE UNIVERSITY: STRUCTURE AND STRAINS

Habits and attitudes formed in the family and the lyc ee seem to be carried over into the university setting. Secondary groups retain the illegitimate aura of the delinquent community. And as a result of numerous factors, the community remains atomized. Having liberated himself from the despotism of parental and school authorities, the student is reluctant to yield to the despotism of the tightly organized association. The development of a uniform group consciousness is hampered by the students' radically different backgrounds, studies, and future orientations—and by intense competition. Finally, the egotistic nature of the study process encourages radical individualism and fails to imbue the student with a submissive Leninist mentality.

The *chahut* therefore remains the most effective means of transcending mass atomization. When pressures build up during exam time, the Latin Quarter invariably explodes into violent *mon mes*, which often have to be suppressed by the police.

The May revolution began as a series of lyc ee-like *chahuts*. At Nantes, students pelted their psychology professors with tomatoes to protest against the "repressive ideological content" of their lectures.⁵² At Nanterre, Cohn-Bendit disrupted Crozier's lectures on American sociological problems by shouting, "What does all this have to do with Vietnam?" Anarchic debates would follow.⁵³

At the university as in the lyc ee, the student community is highly individualized. As Sartre would say, it is *s erialit e*. Authority patterns are also similar. Again we have the absence of intimate, face-to-face relationships between subordinates (the students) and a distant authority (the teacher). In fact, the university teacher tends to be even more unapproachable and autocratic than his counterpart at the lyc ee. The number of professors is very small, and in many faculties there are no lower-level instructors, assistants, or tutors. Rigid, one-way authority relationships predominate with no opportunity provided for feedback.

When dissatisfaction develops, the violent uproar remains the only feasible means of expression. And when this discontent reaches mass proportions, the *chahut* naturally develops into the riot.

The social structure of the university is conducive to anomic collective behavior. But authority and peer-group relationships merely provide the possibility for spontaneous violence. Before behavior of this sort actually develops, the social structure must be subjected to serious strains.

Since the end of World War II, a major source of structural tension has been the student population explosion. In 1946 there were 123,000 students; in 1961, 202,000; and in 1968, 514,000.⁵⁴ Libraries and laboratories have been overrun. Lecture halls are so crowded that students sometimes have to arrive an hour early and sit through the previous lecture in order to get a seat. Student-teacher relationships have completely collapsed. Competition has become increasingly intense. Only 55-60 percent of each class actually take their degrees.

The dissatisfied student who feels that his situation is intolerable has a number of alternatives. First, he can approach the authorities and personally register a complaint. This is apt to be an unsatisfying strategy because, on an academic level, the professor is an almost totally inaccessible figure; communication is one-way: from the top down. On an administrative level, complaining has been equally in-

effectual. As Seale and McConville point out:

A French university is like a factory in Russia: it works to norms ordained by the center. In 1968, all twenty-three universities in the country were state-run; they were administered on rigidly standardized lines, like a government department. The local administrative staff was impotent, the students resentful, and their mutual relations hostile.⁵⁵

Even if they were so inclined, the university administrators could not respond to student demands. "Correct" procedure was explicitly prescribed by the Ministry of Education in Paris. Discontented students had little recourse but to write a letter to the minister.*

The alternative to individual complaint is collective action. But, as has been shown, stable and enduring pressure groups are difficult to maintain. In addition, the governments of the Fifth Republic have been singularly unresponsive to demands set forth by student unions. In 1962, the Gaullists discontinued UNEF's state subsidy. The same year they set up the Fédération nationale des étudiants de France (FNEF)—a "company union"—in order to seduce UNEF's following. Unable to negotiate with the state and starved of revenue, UNEF has stagnated. While in 1961 it had 100,000 members, it now has less than half that number. At the same time, the total student population has risen from 250,000 to half a million.

On one hand, then, the student community, prior to May 1968, had been subjected to increasingly severe strains; on the other hand, its pressure groups had become increasingly ineffectual. Certain structural strains had created massive student dissatisfaction. Since the university social structure is composed of an atomized peer-group facing remote, unresponsive authorities, dissatisfaction can be effectively expressed only through outbursts of violent and spontaneous collective behavior. The riot temporarily transforms

*This overcentralization has, to a large extent, been negated by the extensive reforms which followed the events of May. For a survey of this reform see discussions of Edgar Faure's "Loi d'orientation de l'enseignement supérieur" in the 8 January 1969 issue of *Le Monde*, pp. 1, 8-9.

the student seriality into a cohesive group; it also places direct pressure on usually aloof and indifferent authorities.

Unfortunately, the Communist party has failed to come to grips with these realities. Guided by Leninist ideological principles, it has forcibly condemned student spontaneity. It has tried to channel student discontent by mobilizing the university community into the UEC—an "organization communiste de masse." This is a self-defeating endeavor. Strong psycho-cultural factors militate against organizational discipline; and the development of group identity and collective consciousness is inevitably thwarted by the radical heterogeneity of the student milieu.

In addition, the Bolshevik organizational model is irreconcilable with the essential features of the student revolt. To achieve their goals, the students have to negate certain aspects of the university social structure. They have to destroy the basic aspects of what Crozier calls the "bureaucratic phenomenon." They have to overcome the profound distance which isolates those in command positions from those in subordinate positions. They have to transcend student atomization—student inability to unite for constructive purposes.

In 1968, therefore, the students rebelled against the bureaucratic structure of the university community. To exploit this rebellion, the Party tried to induce the students to accept an almost identical bureaucratic structure. Within the Party authority is distant and unresponsive; the policies of the Union des étudiants communistes are decided by the politburo of the PCF. No deviations are tolerated. In addition, democratic centralism and the interdiction of factions atomize the rank-and-file membership. Within the movement, Communists are not allowed to "unite for constructive purposes"—namely, to formulate and support alternative policies and strategies. As the experience of *les italiens* and *les chinoises* shows, cliques and tendencies are strenuously discouraged.

If they had joined the UEC, the students would have been forced to accept the very structural characteristics they had set out to negate. In short, Leninism posits an organizational model totally inappropriate to the university community.

Appendix: "Plan d'Organisation"

(This set of instructions, issued when the Party was forced to go underground after the outbreak of World War II, is taken from Angelo Rossi, *A Communist Party in Action*, New Haven, 1949.)

The cell is the Party's basic organizational unit. It is therefore imperative that each cell obey the following instructions to the letter:

A. The cell should have a maximum of six members. The resulting decentralization facilitates the holding of meetings. It also makes for improved division of labor and enables the Party to maintain a close check on each militant's performance.

B. Each cell is required to hold weekly meetings. The time and place of these meetings will be changed each week, and those who are to attend will be notified at the latest possible moment. Each meeting will adjourn at the end of 60 or at the most 90 minutes.

C. The agenda for each of these meetings will be as follows: (1) questions relating to finances; (2) questions relating to the cell's operations; (3) questions relating to training and policy.

The secretary of the cell will work out a detailed agenda based on this outline, and will explain it to the comrades present at the meeting in clear and precise language.

Example: questions relating to finances (15 minutes). This will be the first item on the agenda. The treasurer must not fail to explain how important funds are to the Party, or to remind the comrades of their duty both to contribute to these funds and to collect contributions from the Party's numerous sympathizers. Everything relating to money should be taken up under this item.

Questions relating to operations (20-30 minutes). During this important phase of the meeting the cell leader, bearing in mind the Party's security regulations, should assign the members their respective tasks, and make all necessary explanations. Pamphlets; posters; slogans on walls and sidewalks. Display of map of surrounding neighborhoods; assignment of stations and streets to each member. Decision on the most favorable hour for performing each mission, *to be based on recommendations by the comrades.*

Questions relating to training and to Party policies (30 minutes). We must never forget that the cell is the Party's classroom, and that

the comrades are expected to make a genuine intellectual effort to understand Party policy and Party tactics. The meeting should, to this end, discuss the Party's circulars, pamphlets, and newspapers. One of the comrades will offer a brief talk on current problems. Continuous study of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolshevik)* and *Left-wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.

Comrades, the present situation—beyond any in the Party's history—calls for order, discipline, courage, caution. You must seek these qualities in yourselves.

Forward, comrades—to become the true élite of the people and the guarantors of the final victory.

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