

The French Communist Party  
versus the Students

Revolutionary Politics in May–June 1968

by Richard Johnson  
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## THE STYLE OF COMMUNIST VIOLENCE

The Party condemned the student riots, calling them "provocative" and "irresponsible." The vehemence of these protests might lead the naive viewer to conclude that the French Communists have become ardent pacifists. But an examination of the PCF's history and ideology indicates that the Communists have nothing against violence per se. They do, however, believe that *correct* political violence has a definite style, function, and goal.

First, violence must always be controlled from above. According to Eugene Methvin, the Communist's insistence on this control leads to an intricate division of labor among riot cadres. In his study of the Iraqi riots of 1947-48, Methvin identifies seven types of agitators. First, there is an external command, safely removed from the field of battle. Second, there is an internal command within the crowd, protected by a third group—the "bravados" or body guards. Special messengers, the fourth group, carry instructions from the external to the internal commands. Armed shock guards accompany the demonstrators and charge into the crowd in case of police attack—thereby providing for an orderly retreat of the main body of Communist participants. Banner carriers and cheering sections complete the list and are deployed at specific locations throughout the crowd. "By assigning key men to stay near specified banners, the command knows their location at all times and can dispatch messengers to them with instructions for stepping up the tempo, shifting slogans or inciting violence."<sup>1</sup> Methvin notes that Communist riots follow an almost ritualistic scenario: first, preconditioning; second, the selection of proper revolutionary slogans; third, the creation of a crowd nucleus; fourth, on-the-scene agitation; and fifth, the manufacture of martyrs.<sup>2</sup>

The French Party has staged a number of controlled and directed riots, which have followed a program very similar to the one described by Methvin. In November 1948 the Communists used a rise in tramfares to mobilize angry crowds in Marseilles. As the Sixth

Comintern Congress, held in 1928, had instructed: "The task is to utilize minor, everyday needs of the working class as a starting-point from which to lead the working class."<sup>3</sup> Communist conductors refused to apply the new rate; there was a lockout and then a demonstration before the town hall. Four demonstrators were arrested; the Communists tried to "liberate" them, and one man was shot.

The Party then had a martyr. His funeral march turned into an attempt to storm the town hall. The city administration was forced to call in the army; and from November 17 to November 20, Marseilles was in a state of civil war.

The Party used the incident to provoke similar uprisings in other parts of France. Soon, the initial precipitating events were forgotten, and the PCF utilized the agitation to put forth "correct" political slogans. The 1948-52 outbursts became protests against the Communists' expulsion from the government and against the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact.

On May 28, 1952, the Party staged a full-dress battle in the Place de Stalingrad to protest the arrival in Paris of General Matthew Ridgeway. As Fauvet describes it: "The Party, which has never relied on the spontaneity of the masses, carefully organized the day of the 28th." Several thousand militants were mobilized, "with well-trained and experienced men to lead them, armed with iron signs." In the course of the riot, a barricade was built and one participant was killed.<sup>4</sup>

By making sure to maintain control of mass violence, the PCF can use that means to achieve desired tactical ends. In the late forties, for example, mass violence was a useful tool in the struggle against American aid and expansion. In addition, the Party can also use violence of this sort to "raise the level of mass consciousness." Thus, by instigating demonstrations against General Ridgeway and against the electrocution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, two alleged Soviet spies, the PCF helped spread an "anti-imperialist ideology."

But the Communist is always careful to regulate the scope and intensity of mass outbursts. He is careful to make sure that the level of violence is appropriate to the existing period of the revolutionary struggle.

Lenin and Stalin break the process of revolution into three "stages." Each stage represents the struggle for a major socialist objective: first, the creation of an equilibrium of forces, that is the destruction of the hegemony of the ruling class; second, the upsetting of this equilibrium, that is, the seizure of state power; third, the establishment of a new disequilibrium, that is, the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>5</sup>

Violence serves a specific function in each stage. During the first, it is used to weaken and demoralize the ruling class. During the second, it is used for insurrectionary purposes. Both Lenin and Stalin stress that it is absolutely impermissible to engage in insurrectionary violence unless an equilibrium has been established. One cannot use "stage two" violence unless "stage one" violence has completely fulfilled its function.

Thus, the violence of the 1948-50 period was strictly limited in scope. No attempt was made to seize state power. Instead, the PCF tried only to disorganize and confuse the ruling class. In the words of Jules Moch, Minister of the Interior:

Were the strikes a sign of an insurrectionary movement? I for one do not think so. The documents in our possession show that Communist tactics were much more subtle. They had orders to cause trouble . . . in all areas benefitting from American aid, but not to prepare for a revolution.<sup>6</sup>

The PCF invariably responds in a negative manner to violence which is not (1) initiated from above; (2) directed toward correct political goals; and (3) appropriate in intensity and scope to the existing period of the revolutionary process. In 1947, for example, a series of wild-cat strikes broke out at the Renault plants. Christian and Socialist unions supported the strikes, but the Party did all it could to encourage the men to return to work. A similar situation developed in 1953 when, after several years of union inactivity, a series of spontaneous strikes broke out all over France. Again, the Party did everything it could to liquidate them. In both cases, spontaneous forms of social protest proved incompatible with the ritualistic pattern of Communist violence.

It is not surprising, then, that the PCF condemned student behavior in 1968. Far from being directed and controlled, the student riots

were spontaneous and anomic. It was therefore impossible for the Party to use these uprisings to develop "correct mass consciousness." The undirected students had irresponsible and utopian goals such as autogestion and autonomy. By approving of the riots, the PCF would have been giving tacit approval to those ideologically unsound aims. In addition, the scope and purpose of the violence were—from the Party's viewpoint—totally unrealistic. The JCR wanted to seize state power, and the 22 Mars group wanted to destroy it. The *enragés* wanted to skip "stage one" and engage in "stage two" violence. From the perspective of PCF ideology, this was hopelessly adventurist. The Communists, therefore, found the overall style of the student's political action extremely uncongential.

#### STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES

The antagonistic views of violence held by the students and the Party can be partially traced to the fact that the students were, for the most part, operating within the subjectivist revolutionary tradition, while the PCF was caught within the confines of an antithetical objectivist tradition.

Sartre and Luxemburg, two of the students' guides, clearly belong to the subjectivist camp. For Luxemburg, the revolution ultimately occurs as a result of the proletariat's "will to power" and its "strength to act." According to Sartre, the revolution is a project embarked upon by the free and conscious individual. Both thinkers begin with the mind of man. Revolution is viewed as a process whereby man radically restructures the external world in order to bring it into accord with some sort of internal scheme, desire, or "will."\*

Lenin's life belies an undeniable voluntarist tendency. But his writings, especially as they were codified by Stalin, are dominated

\*This is not to say that either Sartre or Luxemburg ignores objective conditions. Luxemburg has produced a number of excellent "objective analyses" of the political and economic situation in Germany. And in his later work, Sartre has placed an important stress on "conditioning." But in both cases, the ultimate emphasis is placed on the subjective, voluntarist moment.

by strong antisubjectivist attitudes. He treats revolution as an event that occurs once certain specific objective conditions have developed. These concrete conditions define a "revolutionary situation." It is the height of political irresponsibility to take revolutionary action without first having made certain that such a situation in fact exists. For the Bolsheviks the immediate configuration of the external world determines, or at least radically limits, the internal attitudes and decisions of revolutionary men.

The orthodox Communist takes subjective feelings into account, but he views them as the outgrowth of objective factors. The states of mind of the masses are conditioned by the material bases of society. In addition, attitudes are viewed as "social facts" that exist outside and independent of the observer. The typical Bolshevik is primarily concerned with an objective evaluation of the attitudes of "the other." He is rarely preoccupied with the condition of his own will to power or strength to act.\*

The Communist measures and evaluates subjective "facts." He cannot determine their nature, but he can accentuate it. His primary tools are organizations. Cells, journals, election meetings, clubs, and strikes all serve to raise the level of mass consciousness.

The subjectivists, on the other hand, view organization as a continual danger to revolution. Luxemburg tells us that regulations, hierarchy, and central directives stifle the proletariat's will to power. Sartre's survey of recent Russian and French history suggests that bureaucratic institutionalization invariably compromises the success of the revolutionary project.

Most of the students seem to have been acting on the basis of subjectivist assumptions. This is evident in their fierce hostility to *les appareils* and *les bureaucraties*. It is also revealed in their notorious slogan, "imagination au pouvoir." It found what was perhaps its most unsettling expression in the assertion that utopia would occur when the last bureaucrat was strangled with the guts of the last political scientist.†

\*The Chinese Communist, who in theory continually engages in self-criticism, might prove the introspective exception to this generalization.

†Political scientists (particularly American political scientists) are characterized by their insistence on objectivity and empiricism. The passions and de-

In addition, a subjectivist bias pervades the popular student conception of the manner in which the events of May developed. The students tended to view themselves as the "detonators" of revolution. They felt their barricades in the Latin Quarter had inspired the proletariat. By standing up to the *flics*, they had taught the workers a lesson.

For the subjectivist, violence plays a crucial role. It is not only an expression of the "esprit révolutionnaire" but also a method of nurturing and strengthening it—and of awakening it in others. This position is, of course, carried to the extreme by Franz Fanon, who argues that terrorism is "therapy" which can be used to free the colonial subject from his slave mentality.<sup>7</sup>

In the eyes of the students, the revolution would come once the "exemplary violence" in the Latin Quarter caught on and spread to the factories, offices, and farms of France.

The PCF regarded such theories as the height of political naiveté. Revolutionary consciousness, they argued, does not spread from group to group, as if it were the measles or the chicken pox. On the contrary, each class in society has a distinctive set of political attitudes, conditioned by both its social roles and the objective conditions to which it is subjected.

The PCF has made a serious attempt to gain a clear picture of mass consciousness. In 1966 it commissioned the Société d'études et des recherches en sciences sociales to carry out an extensive attitude survey of the French voting public. The results were printed in the December 1967 and January 1968 issues of the Party's theoretical journal, *Cahiers du Communisme*. Great attention was paid to the variations between social classes and "catégories socio-professionnelles."\*

sires of the masses are "facts" to be measured and calculated. This detachment is viewed as repressive and reactionary.

\*In *engaging in what the students viewed as "bourgeois empiricism,"* the PCF was following sound Bolshevik precedents. Wolfe informs us that Lenin used detailed questionnaires and sample surveys to assist him in making up pamphlets. *Three Who Made a Revolution* (New York, 1948).

But the empirical investigations of the PCF are guided by certain definite theoretical preconceptions. One's political ideology is thought to be determined by the position he occupies within the existing economic structure. As a result, when the Communist sets about to predict the behavior of a certain segment of the population, he begins by examining its current economic status.

In the eyes of the PCF, the status of *all* socio-economic groups in French society is primarily determined by the fact that capitalism is now in "the epoch of its general crisis."<sup>8</sup> Advances in technology (or changes in the "organic composition of capital") have had two consequences: capital has become concentrated in the hands of a clique of monopolies; and the rate of profit has steadily declined. As a result of these two intimately related developments, the state is no longer simply a tool used to maintain bourgeois order. It has now become an economic agent which directly serves the monopolies. The dominant political fact of the present period is "capitalisme monopole d'état (CME)."<sup>9</sup> De Gaulle, for example, was a faithful servant of the massive enterprises.

The monopolies use the state to try to counteract the effects of the decline in the rate of profit. Government acts to check the power of the trade unions in order to facilitate the *surexploitation* of the proletariat. It also assists the monopolies in their efforts to exploit colonial areas. The state becomes an *état imperialiste*; hence, de Gaulle's stress on national grandeur.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the state helps the monopolies in their attempt to exploit the nonmonopolistic segments of the bourgeoisie. The technocratic pretensions of Gaullism are no more than simple excuses to use governmental power to rapidly eliminate small and "inefficient" enterprises. Hence, the "Commissariat du plan" has made numerous enemies among the small businessman, the farmer, and the shopkeeper.

In a sense, the state becomes a focus of contradictions within capitalist society.\* The monopolies rely on the state more and more

\*The notions of "accumulation of contradictions" and the "displacement of contradictions" from the economic to the political structure are basically Althusserian (see *Pour Marx*, Paris, Maspero 1968). However, Rochet often borrows these concepts in outlining PCF strategy. See, for example, *La Marche de France au socialisme* (Paris, 1967).

to maintain economic and political stability. But to assist business, the state has to progressively increase its control over business. As regulatory agencies grow in power, the sacred rights of private property are negated. In the words of Claude Vernay, a leading Party economist:

On the one hand, the role of the state will doubtless be strengthened. The growing domination of the monopolies will increase the pursuit of immediate profits. But this, in turn, increases the necessity for state control, which alone is capable of instilling the necessary impetus for technological progress, and at the same time, keeping expansion within certain limits, which is the only way to give a momentary respite to capital. However, this increase in the role of the state contributes to the exacerbation of the contradictions within State Monopoly Capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

The main losers in this process are the small businessmen. For the state is manipulated by their enemy, the monopoly clique.

The Party draws a number of strategic conclusions from this analysis. First, the main force of the revolution remains the proletariat—since it directly experiences the *surexploitation* of monopoly capital. But the working class has two potential allies—the petit-bourgeois and the nonmonopolistic segments of the bourgeoisie itself. The latter also suffer at the hands of state monopoly capitalism. As a result, the PCF has formed a proliferation of pressure groups to protect these dislocated capitalists; the Society for the Protection of Family Farms is such a group.

Following the guidelines set down by Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, the PCF has tried to consummate this alliance in parliament. It has tried to overthrow the Gaullists by allying with the lower-middle-class parties—the SFIO and the Radical Socialists.

The Communists justify this use of parliament by arguing that the economic contradiction between monopoly and nonmonopoly capital has been displaced into the political structure. It appears as a contradiction between the executive of the state and the legislature. The monopolists and their Gaullist servants have consolidated their control over the state administration; they therefore seek to expand its power at the expense of the National Assembly which still contains representatives of the lower- and middle-class parties.<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, the PCF can pose as the guardian of parliamentary democracy. It dramatizes this role by projecting two future possibilities. If the Gaullists succeed in their project, CME will be transformed into fascism—as happened in Germany in the thirties. If this is to be averted, the bourgeois democrats must unite with the Party to form a “gouvernement démocratique et populaire.”<sup>13</sup>

The Communists thus insist upon placing de Gaulle and his successors in the antiparliamentary tradition of Bonaparte, Louis-Napoleon, Boulanger, and Pétain. This places the Party in the National Assembly tradition—of 1789, of the Paris Commune, and of the Second, Third, and Fourth Republics.

The strategy of the PCF is therefore based on an “objective analysis of the social totality.”<sup>11</sup> This analysis reveals the weakest point—within the French capitalist system: the contradiction within the state between the executive and the legislature—which, in turn, reflects the economic contradiction between monopoly capital and the middle classes.

The analysis also reveals the manner in which the weakest point must be attacked. The executive must be assaulted through a parliamentary alliance between the PCF and the bourgeois democratic parties. Hence, the Party must project a definite image. It must pose as the protector of traditional democratic and parliamentary traditions.

It is essential to take this total analysis into account when one examines the manner in which the Party reacted to the student uprising. First, the rebellion was viewed as a contradiction *within* the ranks of monopoly capital.\* According to *l'Humanité*, the rebels were “composés en générale de fils de grande bourgeoisie.”<sup>14</sup> Claude Lecompte, editor of the Communist youth magazine, explains it in the following manner. Since the end of World War II bourgeois culture has gone through a process of steady degeneration. There has been a general crisis in bourgeois art, literature, philosophy, morality, and values. This was dramatically illustrated by the prophets of nihilistic despair, the existentialists, and the glorifiers of the absurd.<sup>15</sup>

\*This particular interpretation seems to conflict with that of Prévost and Figuères, who argued that *gauchisme* was a manifestation of “petit-bourgeois political consciousness.”

The rebellion of May represents a climax to this process. The sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie were refusing to accept the “hypocritical values and morals” of their parents. They manifested their refusal by demanding the radical alteration of the university, which is the heart of degenerate bourgeois culture. The ruling class was therefore experiencing a profound, internal ideological crisis.

Consequently, the Party viewed the events of May as contradictions within the enemy camp. As such, they could be used and exploited by the Party. But in traditional Leninist-Stalinist terms, these contradictions were the proletariat's *secondary reserves*.<sup>16</sup> Its *main reserves* were the segments of the population with which it can immediately and directly unite—in this case the middle class.\*

If the Party had given support to the students, the proletariat might have lost its most promising allies. For the attitude surveys carried out by the PCF indicated that the middle classes still harbored deep suspicions of the Party's goals and motives.† It was difficult for the PCF to pose as the defender of parliamentary traditions while, at the same time, fulsomely praising the USSR and outlawing dissent within its own ranks.

It was thus of utmost importance that the Party convince its potential allies that it was a sincere supporter of traditional constitutional processes. This objective was totally irreconcilable with either support for the student riots or Communist participation in anti-system behavior. Allying with the students would have meant sacrificing the proletariat's main reserves for its indirect reserves—a policy which would have made no strategic sense.

Since the PCF was operating within the objectivist tradition, it had a broad strategic perspective. It viewed the university community as one unit in the social totality. Within this single unit, the arguments of Luxemburg, Sartre, and the Fanonistes undoubtedly had

\*In *Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin described the proletariat's “main reserves” as including the “peasantry and the intermediate strata of the population within the country.” Within the secondary or *indirect* reserves, he includes: “the contradictions and conflicts within the non-proletarian classes within the country.” One never sacrifices one's *direct* for one's *indirect* reserves.  
†See *Cahiers du Communism*, December 1967, January 1968.

a certain amount of validity. Given the structure of the university environment, spontaneous violence fulfilled a functional role. It fused the atomized student mass, gave it a sense of solidarity, and allowed it to place direct pressure on remote and unresponsive authorities. But if the Party had adapted itself to the needs of this single social unit, it would have lost the support of other units. Its total strategy would have been disrupted.

#### THE RALLY AND THE RIOT

The radically different strategic and tactical perspectives of the Party and the student revolutionaries can be easily discerned in the actions of each group on the evening of June 10, 1968.

##### *The Rally*

The PCF began its election campaign on that night with a massive rally in a sports arena on the outskirts of Paris. It was a well-controlled and carefully staged event. It began precisely at 8:30 with a singing of the "Marseillaise" and ended precisely at 10:30 with the "Internationale." The seating arrangements mirrored the Party's hierarchical structure. The Parisian candidates for the National Assembly occupied the stage; in the first row sat the politburo and, in the center, the secretary-general, Waldeck Rochet. Behind them ten red flags were interspersed with ten tricolors. The floor of the arena was occupied primarily by members of working-class cells. Delegations from the UEC sat in the balconies. This was only fitting for the working class is the main force of the revolution; the students are merely an auxiliary force.

There were approximately 8,000 persons in the hall; outside, some 3,000-4,000 more listened to the speeches on loudspeakers. Many sat in adjoining cafés and sipped beer or *café crème*.

Fajon, Aragon, Vaillant-Couturier, Ballanger, and Rochet all read brief, carefully prepared speeches. As *France Soir* put it: "One does not improvise at a Communist meeting. Waldeck Rochet is not an orator. His speeches roll on, imperturbably, like a slow river without twists or turns."<sup>17</sup>

The audience was docile; "spontaneous" crowd reactions were perfectly predictable. Whenever a government official was mentioned

there were hisses. Quotes from de Gaulle and Pompidou were greeted with sarcastic laughter. References to the Party's role in the Liberation, its steadfast defense of the proletariat, and its general heroism and responsibility—all brought stormy and prolonged applause.

The rally bore absolutely no resemblance to the student meetings at the Sorbonne, the Mutualité and the Odéon. No speakers were interrupted; no one from the audience demanded to speak; and there was no critical feedback. Perfect order was maintained. In a sense, the authority structure of the meeting reproduced the authority structure of the lecture hall. An unchallenged elite faced a totally submissive mass.

It was precisely this sort of relationship which had sparked the student revolt. As one of the first Nanterre manifestos declared: "The dynamic between teacher and taught must be permanently saved from retrogressing into the old hierarchical relation of master and disciple."<sup>18</sup> At the PCF meeting Rochet clearly set himself up as a master. The audience, on the other hand, was expected to comport itself as an assembly of obedient disciples.

Communist ideology prescribed the form and tone of the meeting. It was structured on the Leninist norms of hierarchy, control, and discipline; a sophisticated vanguard imposed "correct consciousness" on the untutored mass.

But a Blanquist element was also apparent. An elite used and manipulated its popular following in order to seize power at the summit. One of the primary purposes of this grand rally was to demonstrate the magnitude of the PCF's mass base. Rochet had to prove to the Federation of the Left that a sizable segment of the electorate *demand*ed that the Communists be included in any popular government. The Party had to use its electoral strength to destroy the possible formation of a non-Communist, center-left coalition. This desire is clearly—if somewhat circumlocutiously—expressed in Rochet's speech to the rally.

The workers and democrats wish neither a patched-up Gaullist regime, nor some sort of a "third force." We are for a popular government and a democratic union based on support from all parties on the left and on the will of the people—a government in which we, the Communists, will have the role due to us.<sup>19</sup>

If the PCF was to retain and expand its electoral following, it had to improve its image. De Gaulle was doing his best to associate the Party with the violence and anarchy of May. He hoped to thus seduce the more conservative elements of the petit-bourgeoisie and proletariat, many of whom usually voted for leftist candidates.

Rochet had to destroy the notion that the Communists were enemies of order. Consequently, he firmly denounced the *gauchistes*. "By their methods, their recourse to violence, these groups have done everything to discredit the great popular movement which opposes the Gaullist power. We Communists are not adventurers."<sup>20</sup>

The style and tone of the grand rally were intended to reinforce this verbal declaration. The Communists were not rioters and barricade-builders; on the contrary, they were responsible citizens who held orderly, decorous meetings. The PCF had no intention of violently destroying the Republic. It decorated its meetings with a profusion of tricolors, and it began its rally with a rousing rendition of the "Marseillaise." In short: Communists are orderly, peace-loving patriots.

#### THE STUDENT RIOT

Just as the meeting was ending, a group of fifty students was leaving the Sorbonne and marching down the Boulevard St. Michel chanting "Ils ont tué un camarade." That afternoon a boy named Giles Tautin had accidentally drowned when he fell into a river while running from the CRS, the national riot police. He was a seventeen-year-old lycéen who belonged to the Union des jeunesses communistes (marxistes-léninistes). At the time of his death he was in a Parisian suburb trying to "serve" the striking workers at a Renault factory.

Fifteen minutes after the Communist rally ended, a crowd of angry demonstrators had gathered in the Place St. Michel. By 12:30 A.M., the original group of fifty had grown to several thousand. They faced a cordon of CRS agents who were blocking the entrance to the Pont Neuf. Directly across the Seine was the Prefecture of Police—the Paris headquarters of the "forces of order."

Within an hour the violence had begun. Police and students exchanged tear gas and molotov cocktails. A police van was burned

down, and numerous barricades were constructed. All available evidence indicates that the riot was totally spontaneous. An analysis of this "hostile outburst" will provide some useful insights into the natural political tendencies of the student mass. In the course of this analysis, it should become obvious that the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism keeps the PCF from adapting itself to these tendencies.

#### BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

In his *Theory of Collective Behavior* (1962), Smelser points out that most hostile outbursts are touched off by precipitating incidents. To act as an effective catalyst, these incidents must reinforce the generalized beliefs of the hostile subjects.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the months of May and June, stories of police brutality had been circulating in the Latin Quarter. The newspapers and magazines were full of atrocity stories. Early in June UNEF and SNEsup published the *Livre noir*, an anthology of such incidents, which remained at the top of the best-seller list for several weeks.

Animosity toward the CRS was widespread. Its brutality and sadism were universally recognized. Consequently, many found it easy to believe that the police had "murdered" Giles Tautin. When I arrived in the Place St. Michel, I asked a bystander why the crowd had gathered. He informed me that the police had "drowned" a young lycéen. When I expressed surprise, another assured me that this indeed had been the case. CRS agents had captured the boy, thrown him into the icy river, and stood by and gleefully watched him drown. There were a number of other variations. Some said that the police had first knocked the boy down, beat him unconscious, and then tossed him in the water. In short, the CRS then were "generally believed" to be capable of anything. The death of Giles Tautin was an ideal precipitating incident.

Communist agitators are often unable to use exciting, ready-at-hand precipitants; for they must consciously select events which illustrate—or at very least are congruent with—the prevailing party line. The death of Giles Tautin obviously could not have been exploited. He was a Maoist, and the elimination of an irresponsible



left adventurist is hardly a valid reason for a mass uprising. (On the contrary, it is a cause for discreet celebration.)

When the PCF starts riots, it chooses "principled" issues, or it puts "unprincipled" issues (i.e., high tram fares) into principled terms. In the early fifties, for example, it utilized the implementation of the Marshall Plan, the arrival of General Ridgeway in Paris, and the arrest of Jacques Duclos as excuses for rioting.

At times, such events are genuinely inspiring. The deaths of the French workers in the 1947-48 strikes are a good example. But frequently, as was the case with the American aid issues, the party line has little to do with generalized beliefs and predispositions. Hence, the PCF's ability to mobilize the masses by provoking hostile outbursts is seriously circumscribed by ideology.

The Leninist would argue that this is as it should be. In theory, the main purpose of riots and demonstrations is to raise the level of mass consciousness. One strengthens the individual's grasp of ideology by letting him translate certain aspects of it into concrete activity. There is no value in rioting for rioting's sake; rioting is simply *one* method of political enlightenment.

But the "leftist" would argue that participating in collective and violent action is in itself educational. Revolutionary personalities emerge from revolutionary action. By building barricades and tossing paving stones, one develops "un esprit révolutionnaire."

The first step in the mobilization process entails spreading word of the precipitating incident. Modes of communication must obviously be adjusted to the nature of the milieu in which one is operating. The labor agitator has all his potential hostile subjects aggregated in the factory. He can call a meeting, confront the workers, and explain to them the purpose, goals, tactics, and location of the proposed demonstration. Parisian students, on the other hand, are dispersed throughout the Latin Quarter. The only places where sizable crowds congregate are lecture halls and the university restaurants—where agitation is officially forbidden. Nevertheless, there are ways in which messages can be circulated. Rumors travel rapidly through informal communications networks.

Bourdieu and Passeron point out that although the student community lacks stable secondary groups:

The sporadic contacts and chance conversations are sufficient for the propagation of rumors, often of the panic type about professors, their requirements and their manias. Although the circulation of the information about the subject and organization of examinations is slow and uncertain, the propagation of the most extravagant rumors is fast and widespread.<sup>22</sup>

There are a number of areas in the Latin Quarter where students customarily congregate: cafés, bookstores, movie houses, etc. The news of a precipitating incident can be rapidly circulated in these places. As Kaplan points out, "When . . . circumstances for collective behavior provide an opportunity for crowd behavior, the social situation of students makes it likely that they will hear of it, have associates in it, and have time to join themselves."<sup>23</sup>

There are a number of tactical advantages to be obtained from this method of mobilization. First, rumors are extremely malleable. When one hears a vague and hurriedly repeated story, he tends to *select* those elements which are congruent with his preestablished beliefs, prejudices, and preferences. When one passes a rumor on to another, he emphasizes and omits on the basis of his perceptions of the other's preestablished system of beliefs.

The story of Giles Tautin's death passed rapidly from café to café, and from book stall to book stall. On the way, it adapted itself to the generalized beliefs of the student mass. In addition, as it passed from student to student, it was also adjusted to the individual outlooks of those who heard it.

When a Communist agitator confronts a crowd and speaks to it directly, this sort of flexibility is impossible to obtain. If the party line has been formulated in such a way that it conflicts with the basic predispositions of the audience, the demonstration will probably be a failure. The possibility of adaptation is severely limited. There will be slight variations in understanding and interpretation, but all will hear essentially the same message.

Consequently, clear communication often inhibits the effectiveness of a hostile outburst. The PCF agitator tells the potential hostile subjects the causes, goals, style and tactics of the demonstration. Some subjects may disagree with the goals, others with the tactics.

As a result, many may stay home. But when one is told that "the CRS have killed a lycéen and a crowd has gathered in the Place St. Michel," one can make of it what he will. Flexibility of this sort obviously has its advantages in a radically heterogeneous milieu.

For example, the day after the June 10 demonstration, I recorded interviews with fifty riot participants encountered on a random basis in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. Since this sample was limited and unscientifically chosen, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about student motivations. These interviews do, however, reveal that students participated for a wide variety of reasons. Some expressed explicitly *political* motives:

The demonstration showed that the young people of the extreme left have succeeded, through the force, the effectiveness, and the firmness of their principles, in spreading throughout the whole country their basic demands—that is to say, an increase in worker's wages and the overthrow of the present regime. Although the original cause of the demonstration was the bludgeoning of a young lycéen and his subsequent death in the Seine, the demonstration also shows a continuity with our basic demands.

A Maoist informed me that he had demonstrated because the murder of Giles Tautin was:

a new act of the Gaullist powers against the young students and intellectuals who wish to place themselves at the service of the workers in their struggle against the capitalist state.

Although both subjects were highly politicized, they expressed significantly different ideological outlooks. The first envisioned the students in vanguardist terms—as an elite which spread certain demands throughout the nation. The second spoke in orthodox Maoist terms. He saw the petit-bourgeois student as placing himself at the service of the proletariat.

Many of those interviewed spoke in nonpolitical terms. The following subject, for example, emphasized that he was not a member of any political organization.

It (participating in the riot) was the logical thing to do after what happened yesterday at Flins. It is inevitable that there be violence after a man is killed like that.

The June 10 crowd was definitely not a "uniform, undifferentiated mob." Each individual seems to have been motivated by a unique set of factors; and each appears to have sought a unique set of psychic satisfactions.

The Communist demonstration, on the other hand, is not designed to provide disparate individuals with disparate satisfactions. The PCF agitator attempts to impose uniform goals and a uniform sense of purpose. However, while his mode of organization might very well be suited to the homogenous factory, it seems ill-adapted to the varied and heterogeneous university milieu.

Each individual participates in the hostile outburst for particular reasons. Nevertheless, the *form* of the riot is produced by the underlying structural characteristics of the community as a whole. The rioters are members of an atomized community, which feels itself oppressed by a distant and unresponsive state. The students' collective behavior in May 1968, therefore, had to fulfill certain functions. It had to negate the individuated, disunified nature of the community; and it also had to strike a direct blow at the authorities.

Atomization can be overcome only if a sense of group consciousness can be created. Thus to transcend their heterogeneity, the students had to find themselves in a situation in which common beliefs, attitudes, and emotions could develop. The Communist rally and the riot both formed "collectivities." Both aggregated a mass of disparate individuals, subjected them to common experiences, and aroused with them similar ideas and emotional responses.

But before a true "group" can emerge, the individuals must become aware of their similarity. *The "one" must see his "self" in the other.* One can sense the feelings of the anonymous "other" only if he translates them into activity of some sort. At the rally, common activity was limited to the singing of two songs, sporadic applause, and occasional hissing. During the riot, on the other hand, common emotion tended to express itself in dramatically explicit terms. For example, the students were united in their common hatred

of the CRS. One immediately became aware of the "other's" hatred, for he expressed it by hurling paving stones, setting police cars on fire, and tossing molotov cocktails.

In Sartrean terms, the student seriality was transformed into a *group-en-fusion* as its members realized that they were confronted by a common threat and subsequently reacted with a collective response.

When the outside group [in this case the CRS] totalizes the multiplicity [the students] the latter totalizes itself. . . . Each individual knows himself to be unified with all the others by a common exigency. His danger is my danger and vice-versa.<sup>24</sup>

The rioters joined the demonstration for many different reasons. But in doing so, all took the same risks, broke the same laws, and courted the same danger. When one looked into "the other's" face, he saw his own fear. When one saw a comrade being clubbed by a policeman, he saw his own "future possibility."

Consequently, the individual student made a decision to both protect *himself* and protect the *group*. He cooperated in the building of the barricades. Whatever their subsequent symbolic value, the barricades were initially constructed as a method of self-defense. They were simply a means of interposing a protective barrier between the advancing CRS and the students who were "under attack."

At the same time, the building of the barricades was a manifestation of—and a major contribution to—the emergence of a firm sense of group consciousness. If the individual had been interested in merely protecting himself, he would have fled. Instead, he strove to protect himself *as a member of a group*. He tried to defend the integrity and cohesiveness of the collectivity by constructing a protective fortress.

Sartre's analysis of the storming of the Bastille is relevant in this regard.

The apparent contradiction between me as an insider of a passive seriality and me as an outsider who totalizes the series under menace finds its solution in *action*. The Parisians storm into the streets and *through their act* overcome the psychological malaise.

Through *action* one is practically integrated. The third man [the individual student] emerges both as human organizer of a unity and as human part of that unity, but in the very act of free participation, whether as unifier or unified, he dissolves the seriality.<sup>25</sup>

At the Palais de Sport, this phenomenon did not develop. Collective admiration for Rochet was periodically expressed through applause. But on the whole, possibilities for cooperation and collective endeavor were few. By virtue of the individual's absolute submission to the Party leadership, he remained a passive object rather than becoming an active subject. He was not allowed to become the Sartrean third man, who through his free, individual action totalized the group.

Some may infer from this analysis that many students found riots to be more satisfying than mass meetings. And, indeed, given the structure of the university community, we can safely assume that certain psychological states were widespread. The atomized nature of the community probably generated a certain sense of isolation and anomie. The oppressive, unresponsive authorities probably aroused feelings of anger, resentment, and frustration.

At the riot, atomization was overcome; for several hours an intense mood of solidarity and unity was created. The participant developed a strong sense of group consciousness. The meeting, on the other hand, provided only a vague sense of belonging. On the whole, both "oneself" and "the other" remained passive and anonymous entities.

In addition, the rioters—by virtue of their group membership—felt they could strike a direct blow at the authorities. For once they could leap the gulf that usually separates those in command positions from those who must obey. The student could express his hostility and resentment toward the "they." He could displace his aggression toward the overbearing parent, the aloof teacher, the unresponsive administration, or the all-powerful state. The uniformed police were perfect symbols of authority; they provided an ideal target for long repressed aggressions.

The psychic satisfactions of the rally were meager in comparison. One was able, on a number of occasions, to boo and hiss at de Gaulle.

However, while some might obtain a certain vicarious pleasure from such activities, they really do not compare with being able to hurl molotov cocktails at riot police. At the rally, one's direct relationship to authority (i.e. Rochet and company) was one of submission—not rebellion or revenge.

While the rally provided only a limited sense of solidarity and only a modest opportunity for indirect aggression, it nevertheless demanded significant concessions from the individual. The PCF line was imposed on an obedient and uncritical audience. If a member wished to submerge himself in the Communist community, he had to abandon his personal beliefs and attitudes. For the duration of the meeting, at least, he had to accept the PCF's ideology. He had to clap for the Party's conception of "good" and hiss the Party's conception of "evil."

The riot demanded no such psychic surrender. Some rioted to protest injustice; others rioted to weaken the capitalist state; still others rioted for the sheer pleasure of rioting—"parce que la révolution, c'est un fête." Participation in the riot did not imply the acceptance of any line, doctrine, program, or ideology.

#### LUXEMBURG, THE STUDENTS, AND THE PCF

The Parisian student community—like all communities—contains its own characteristic contradictions. In May 1968 the PCF imposed its universal Leninist-Stalinist solutions and, as a result, found itself unable to cope with the particularity of these contradictions.

As Luxemburg points out, the members of a given community have an immediate, intuitive grasp of the tactical problems posed by their milieu. As a result, they can spontaneously develop creative solutions to these problems. Central apparatuses, on the other hand, tend to impose inappropriate policies on unfamiliar terrains.

The university community in France is troubled by a combination of structural and psychological contradictions. Since students are "oppressed" by distant and unresponsive authorities, they must unite and bring their collective power to bear. But this structural pressure for unity is counteracted by a number of factors—notably the extreme heterogeneity of the students and the radically free, unstructured nature of their life styles.

Presumably, this combination of atomization and radical freedom produces a certain amount of loneliness and anomie. Nevertheless, "nurturant needs" for group-belonging are counteracted by a cultural and psychological bias against collectivism. There remains a general scarcity of stable, enduring secondary groups.

The students have managed to spontaneously resolve these contradictions. They have discovered that the solution lies in the hostile outbursts, that is, the *chahut*, the *monôme*, and, ultimately, the full-scale political riot. The outburst places direct pressure on the authorities. In addition, it provides an outlet for aggressions and repressed hostility. The anomic crowd temporarily provides an intense feeling of solidarity and belonging, yet it does not compromise the participant's long-range freedom. It overcomes the extreme heterogeneity of the student community but does not destroy this heterogeneity.

As Luxemburg predicted, the students have intuitively grasped their unique problems and have spontaneously evolved unique solutions—*periodic explosions of violent and anomic collective behavior*.

- 45 Ibid., p. 54.
- 46 Ibid., p. 56.
- 47 Pitts, "Continuity and Change," p. 251.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 255-56.
- 49 Ibid., p. 257.
- 50 Crozier, *Bureaucratic-Phenomenon*, p. 241.
- 51 "French Education," *Yale French Studies*, no. 22; 1958-59, p. 57.
- 52 Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, p. 30.
- 53 Ibid., p. 32.
- 54 Maureen McConville and Patrick Seale, *Red Flag, Black Flag* (New York, 1968), p. 22.
- 55 Ibid., p. 27.

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- 1 Eugene H. Methvin, "Mob Violence and Communist Strategy," *Orbis*, Summer 1961, p. 175.
- 2 Ibid., p. 169.
- 3 Ibid., p. 167.
- 4 Jacques Fauvet, *Histoire du parti communiste français*, tome 2 (Paris, 1965), p. 242.
- 5 Cyril Black and Thomas Thornton, *Communism and Revolution* (Princeton, 1964), p. 33.
- 6 Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (New York, 1968), p. 190.
- 7 Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, 1957).
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- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Claude Vernay, "Aspects de la politique économique de pouvoir," *Economie et Politique*, numéro 168-169, July-August 1968, pp. 12-13.
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- 14 *L'Humanité*, May 3, 1968.
- 15 Interview with Claude Lecompte, editor of *Nous, les garçons et les filles*, July 19, 1968.
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- 17 *France Soir*, June 11, 1968.
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- 19 *L'Humanité*, June 11, 1968.

- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (London, 1962), pp. 247-53.
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- 23 Christopher Katope et al., *Beyond Berkeley* (New York, 1965), p. 406.
- 24 Wilfred Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York, 1965), p. 130.
- 25 Ibid., p. 131; see also Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris, 1960), pp. 394-431.

## CHAPTER 9

- 1 Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism*, trans. Arnold Pomerans (New York, 1968), p. 170.
- 2 "Reflections on the French Upheaval," editorial by Paul Sweezy, *The Monthly Review*, New York, September 1968.
- 3 Rosa Luxemburg, *Marxism or Leninism?* (Ann Arbor, 1967), p. 98.
- 4 Robert Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (New York, 1969), pp. 181-98.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Donald W. Treadgold, *Twentieth-Century Russia* (Chicago, 1964), p. 317.
- 7 Angelo Rossi, *La Guerre des papillons* (Paris, 1954).
- 8 For an alternative view that stresses the unique character of the postwar period of violence and argues that it was initiated to restore membership losses sustained from 1945-47, see Thomas H. Greene, "The Communist Parties of Italy and France: A Study of Comparative Communism," *World Politics*, October 1968.
- 9 "D'ésaccords publics entre le Parti communiste français et le Parti communiste de l'union soviétique," *Est et Ouest*, 1-15 September 1968, pp. 13-16.
- 10 Compare the politburo declaration of 21 August 1968 with the central committee declaration of 22 August 1968, both of which were published on p. 1 of *L'Humanité*.
- 11 The most prominent pro-Soviet dissident was the widow of Maurice Thorez, Jeannette Vermeersch, who made her opposition known at the central committee meeting of August 22 and later resigned from the Party.
- 12 Annie Kriegel, *Les Communistes français* (Paris, 1968), pp. 145, 221-23; "A Propos des finances du Parti communiste français," *Est et Ouest*, 16-31 July 1967, pp. 2-10. Evidence suggests that during the fall and winter of 1968 the CPSU applied pressure on a number of nonruling parties to expel vocal dissidents. During this time, Franz Marek was expelled from the Austrian Party, the "manifesto group" from the PCI, and Garaudy from the PCF. It seems likely that Moscow brought financial pressures to bear on the reluctant Party leaderships, in order to attain this coordinated international purge.