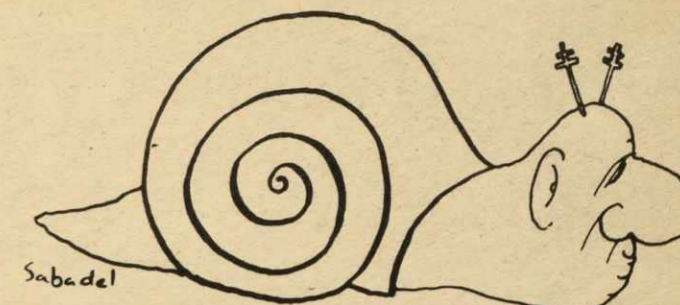
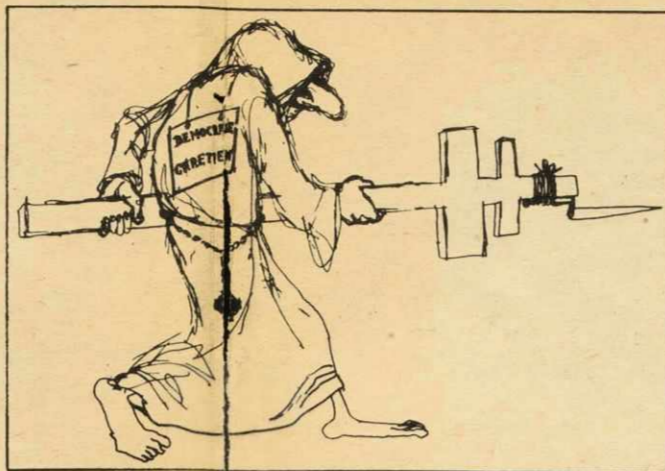


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The French revolt has only begun

Bruce Archibald, Associate Editor of the Gazette, has recently returned from France. He witnessed first-hand the events which led to this analysis of the French student-worker revolt. Cartoons accompanying the article are from the pamphlet Enrage which had its beginning in the first weeks of the Paris riots and has continued to provide pictorial comment in the weeks which followed.

During the events of May, De Gaulle was forced to use police state tactics which never generate the spirit of compromise on which a liberal democratic government is supposed to operate. Great numbers of "sympathizers" have been forced to take up active positions, so that while DeGaulle's opposition may have (officially) decreased numerically, it has a stronger core. As initiators of the whole chain of events, students have been "used" by the forces of the moderate left to swing opinion their way, and used by the Gaullists as convenient scapegoats.

The negotiations which are now taking place between the government and the universities will certainly result in academic and administrative reform, but as for the real question of the changing role of the university in society, nothing can possibly change under the Gaullist regime. The fact that riot police still occupy most of the university buildings shows the atmosphere under which negotiations are taking place.

Problems for Consideration

Presuming that Canadian students have and should have many of the same aims as French students -- democratization of the university, improved teaching standards, and a more meaningful role for the university in society, what can we learn from the events this summer in France?

Firstly, students must begin thinking politically. The political awareness, enthusiasm, and sense of social responsibility possessed by the majority of French students is at a much more advanced level than those of the Canadian student. In French universities there is no longer the feeling of being in a sterile intellectual community, removed from real life where politics is some sort of game. French students are in the thick of the political process, they know it, and they are prepared to act upon that knowledge.

The main problem for the "left" posed by the eventual failure and repression of the university "revolution" is the age-old (or Marx-old) question of "revolution versus evolution" as the proper tactic.

Did the student-worker posture of absolutely no compromise (which certainly led to the right-wing reaction on the part of the population) embitter possible sympathizers and prevent greater reform via "conventional legal" means or is real progress possible along this line. Is confrontation and polarization the best means to effect change. Some sort of comment, if no answer, to this question, will present itself this fall when the French universities resume their courses in the late fall.

Student politicians, activists, and those with any sort of social conscience should be waiting the coming events and study them eagerly. The French social ferment is not yet over.



such violence by the French Riot Police that public opinion swung behind the students and from the 10th of May onwards the strike in education was supported increasingly by strikes in industry until over 10 million workers (the vast majority of the French labour force) was on strike.

Labour takes Initiative

French labour was not on strike merely out of sympathy. The cost of living in France is one of the highest in Europe while only the Italian average was less than that of the French. But the interesting fact is that as the strike continued the workers became more and more interested in democratic control of their own factories rather than in pure financial gain.

This stance was unforeseen by union leaders, who were being out-flanked to the left by their own membership and whose negotiations for mere pay increases and better hours were viewed by many workers as a "sell-out" to the capitalists of the Gaullist regime. Such an attitude, though usually generated by younger workers, was not necessarily located in centres of student activism, but spread throughout the industrial areas of France. The commonplace habit of blaming such situations on student "rabble-rousers" does not hold true. People were reacting to 10 years of Gaullism which had left them in the backwash of the more spectacular efforts to gain prestige and the support of public opinion -- the French H-bomb, a large foreign aid program, the politics of the Common Market, an attempt at an independent foreign policy, and in a more mundane sense the cleaning and refurbishing of public buildings and monuments. The needs of the ordinary man had been forgotten in the greater glory but the nemesis had come.

Lack of Leadership

As the strike went on, however, the lack of leadership on the left became painfully obvious. Trade union leaders were more concerned with material gains than revolutionary change; the Communist Party tried to harness the student initiative and direct it through "legitimate" channels. Students called this a sellout, a program of reformism rather than real change.

An interesting comment came from the right-

wing newspaper the Figaro which felt that the Communist Party and Trade Unions leaders had conducted themselves, for the most part, with great restraint. Many observers believe that if the Communist Party had taken up a revolutionary line De Gaulle might have fallen.

This is not mere optimism on the part of political activists of the left. There were many in the owning and managerial classes who felt that the time had come and were hurriedly transferring their savings to foreign banks in preparation for a hasty departure.

Election in Retrospect

A short analysis of the election just called can best show the development of the political situation. Gaullist forces united with those of the extreme right to present a united front against "the chaos of anarchy" and the "new menace of communism".

De Gaulle had regained complete control of the radio and T.V. running a propaganda campaign which the other parties were powerless to reply.

Seven radical political organizations were banned from the elections, and the election roles used were the same as the last election so that few people under 23 were able to vote.

However, these measures played a minimal role in the Gaullist victory. The major factor was fear, and the Gaullists used it to best advantage. As one communist party official put it "Every car burned means thousands of votes for the Gaullists". While the strength of the moderate socialists remained about the same, the communist party lost in the polarization to the left by those who considered the Communists to have sold-out. The only party of the far left which gained was the Parti Socialiste Unifié which upheld most of the revolutionary principles advocated by "hard-line" elements among the students, workers and intellectuals.

What does this leave on the French political scene?

On the surface one has a strong Gaullist government, guardian of the status quo, spouting liberal rhetoric and having to make definite concessions though not sweeping reforms. The regime has definitely been strengthened, but DeGaulle's desire to eliminate class and generational conflict has been shattered.

