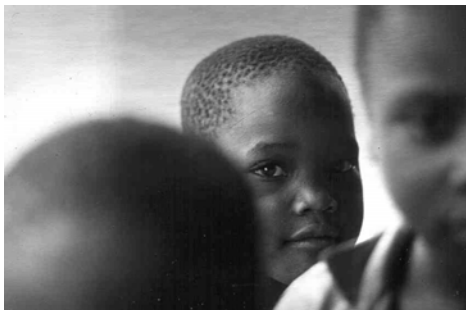


“In March 1994, the French government wanted to give its tender young wage slaves a 20% pay cut. The State must have figured it would be good training for their future careers as exploited human capital. But a funny thing happened on the way to the bank: those vulnerable young workers stood up and told the State to royally (or rather democratically) fuck off. It took a month of demos, protests, and riots, becoming ever bigger, more violent, and out of control, for the government to finally back down.”

“On one side was the unions' rhetoric: “Watch out, nice students, there are hooligans among you!” On the other side, many students only reacted to the police repression. Our slogan was: “*Nous sommes tous des casseurs!*” (“We are all hooligans”)”

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“NOUS SOMMES  
TOUS DES  
CASSEURS”

“WE ARE ALL HOOLIGANS”

Youth Revolt in France, March 1994

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What good does it do today to be part of a system that destroys all human feeling, offering no hope of emancipation?

Commodity production is more and more relegated to the southern countries, while the so-called “advanced” societies are organized around the these commodities' circulation. Consumption rules the tiniest moments of what's called leisure, defending private property and the State. Human beings are useless to this world, since they exist only in their value, in their usefulness to the society as economic pawns. A world that has chosen Having over Being is a world to attack. And this Bastille of hypocrisy will only fall along with everything defending it: prison, media, school, business, and government are different faces of the same alienation. The critique of this world can't go half-way.

It is Utopian (small “u”) to believe that there is a peaceful solution to capitalist exploitation - and a betrayal.

To those who call us crazy, we answer that there's no greater madness than the present way of the world. *In a society that has abolished all adventure, the only adventure left is the abolition of the society!* To do that, people have to meet each other, talk, fight, and admit to themselves that they have nothing to lose but their illusions.

*Apprentices of the “Weltanschauung” and the “Gemeinwesen”*

*Translated by Saul - POB 13515, Berkeley, CA 94712 USA*

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## No Fear!

Since the end of the 70s. the same kind of thinking has dominated people's minds, while money and the State have continued to spread everywhere on earth, freezing over all non-commodity relationships, every dream of Utopia, of breaking the routine of daily life. We've despised the individualism of looking out for number one...while the Chernobyl cloud darkens the horizon, and AIDS screws up our loving, and unemployment threatens the survival of the taxpayers/workers/retirees, while the ghetto underclass mutters bitterly, and while the nationalist and fundamentalist demagogues announce their bloody come-back. (...)

Weird paradox; while we have never had so little power over our own lives, and over our environment, we blind ourselves to our powerlessness by aspiring to do a bit of humanitarian work (either by writing checks or voting) against these "horrors." In fact, nobody is innocent in these conditions of general misery. The rulers' alibi is in the cowardice of the ruled. The citizen-consumers of this end of the millennium, in so far as they have not become conscious of their own power, of the possibility to make history instead of submitting to it, are also responsible for their situation.

At the moment, no one (or so few) questions the system's logic. No one is trying to create new historical situations. Everyone obeys the rules of a game that no one has chosen.

These people demanding the right to work, the sharing of the wealth, a decent wage for all: are they naive, stupid, ignorant, or cowards? Whatever the problem is, they have neglected to say that the word work, whether forced or paid for, is not a synonym for multipurpose, consensual human activity, for free creativity, or for the seeking of knowledge (the French travail, to work, comes from the Latin *tripalium*, a torture device. The slogan "work makes you free" was inscribed on the gates of Nazi concentration camps). Work is coercion, stolen time, an impoverishment of life. To work means sacrificing oneself to a so-called utilitarian logic.

*"Work makes the best policeman, fettering and bridling the development of reason, desire, and the taste for independence, because it consumes an incredible amount of energy, keeping it from thought, contemplation, dreams, worries - from love and from hate. It keeps its sights on small-minded goals that guarantee easy and regular satisfaction."*Nietzsche.

History has witnessed slaves obeying masters (and vice-versa), serfs obeying the Christian and feudal world-view ("those who work, who make war, who pray"). It has seen the same serfs uprooted and turned into workers, subjects of a new church - the factory, and its religion, the Economy, the employee subject to the management of goods and services... It's insane and absurd, this division of people and of work, taken under the pretext of superior interests (God, Progress, the Economy, the Party, the Nation...), including the ideologies that it evolved in response to resistance, which still seek to isolate people behind a screen of consensus and false unity. BUT THERE IS NOTHING ABOVE HUMAN BEINGS: nothing that can justify coercion, obedience, sacrifice. That's today's horrible contradiction, which heightens people's dependency with unemployment.

## Translator's Introduction

In March 1994, the French government wanted to give its tender young wage slaves a 20% pay cut. The State must have figured it would be good training for their future careers as exploited human capital. But a funny thing happened on the way to the bank: those vulnerable young workers stood up and told the State to royally (or rather democratically) fuck off. It took a month of demos, protests, and riots, becoming ever bigger, more violent, and out of control, for the government to finally back down.

One-fourth of young people in France are unemployed. The government, under prime minister Eduard Balladur, came up with the bright idea to "create jobs" by lowering the minimum wage for workers age 25 and under. The bill was called the CIP: *contrat d'insertion professionnelle*, or "beginning work contract." Supposedly, bosses would hire more youth if their wages were lower: it was presented as a way of "sharing jobs," a remedy for unemployment. The anti-CIP movement of March 1994 can safely be called the biggest class struggle in Europe since the UK's anti-Poll Tax movement of 1990-92, involving hundreds of thousands of demonstrators and rioters taking to the streets throughout the country many times over the course of a month. A glimpse at the major French media of the time shows a widespread editorial skepticism. Even the Employers' Association said it wouldn't work. This climate of mainstream opposition to the law certainly made it easier for the protest movement to develop. Most people were opposed to the law. But even more interesting than this protest was the way it gave rise to violent mass action. Especially in the provinces, the demos more and more gave way to riot as they progressed. The media quickly began trying to impose the idea that an innocent, peaceful protest was being taken advantage of by bad people called "hooligans." This issue became a major preoccupation in the movement, the subject of numerous leaflets handed out in demonstrations, some translated here. "*Nous sommes tous des casseurs*" - "we're all hooligans" - was one of the slogans raised against that kind of propaganda.

Throughout this pamphlet, the English word hooligan has been used to translate the French word "*casseur*." As with much translation, this is just slightly incorrect. *Casseur* literally means "breaker," and has traditionally meant simply "thief." The Communist Party much more powerful in France than in the US or UK, began using *casseur* to label their enemies on the left who wouldn't take their orders and preserve bourgeois property during demonstrations and such. In this sense, it could be translated "trouble-maker" or "wrecker," someone too radical or dangerous, with the implication of police provocateur. Today the verb *casser* means to riot, and more precisely to loot, although there's another verb for that. You can also *casse* the cops. It's kind of like 'fuck shit up,' but then there's another phrase for that as well. Anyway, "hooligan" comes closest.

It is worth contrasting the 1994 movement with the unrest in 1986, as documented in a pamphlet similar to this one. *France Goes Off the Rails* (available from BM Blob, London WCIN 3XX. UK). The situations offer several striking differences. The student movement of '86 was in response to a university reform seen as making it more difficult for students to become cadres or managers. In 1994 it was in response to a minimum wage cut. The targets were different, the response was different. The one short

night of rioting in 1986 was nothing compared to '94. In '86: "As a demo was passing in front of La Sante prison, jailbirds shouted, 'Come on lads, smash everything up'; a student shouted back, 'We're not in '68'" (Rails) This time around, another march went by that prison, only this time hundreds of cars got wrecked. The change is clear. In '86 the students were predominantly opposed to the idea of acting in common with non-students: "During a meeting, a student said she disagreed with a call to workers' unions for support because 'What shall we do if someday they ask us to support them?'" They checked IDs at the doors of their assemblies. In '94, to the extent that it was a student movement (and it wasn't, being defined by work, not school), the doors were wide open, and in some cases, particularly in Nantes, students actively invited the participation of all workers and poor.

The anti-CIP movement has to be understood in the context of recent history. This movement, large as it was, was only the culmination of a six month period of unrest, beginning with the outstanding Air France strike in October 1993 (a good article on it is available from 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton St., London SE17 UK.), which was the first of a series of government retreats in the face of wildfire, violent, opposition. The following documents refer to this and other struggles leading up to the anti-CIP movement and discuss how they influenced its spirit. Each time it was faced with a movement that threatened to get out of control, the government chose to back down rather than impose a heavy repression that might have backfired. This policy of prudent retreat was dubbed "the elastic response." Notably, this strategy took heavy criticism from pragmatic English journals the *Economist* and the *Financial Times*, accusing Balladur of grave cowardice before the slightest opposition. At Air France it worked splendidly - just as Balladur was giving up on the CIP, the Air France workers were cajoled into swallowing the same austerity package they'd fought so hard for in October. France has been somewhat calmer in the year since these events, the main exception being the phenomenon of widespread, dispersed "mini-riots" in the suburban ghettos (in France the poor are kept in the suburbs, not the inner cities) all over the country. This subject deserves a pamphlet all its own. There is only one short text dealing with it here, "Reality doesn't count anymore." These riots usually find the same protagonists - the "casseurs" - attacking the cops and property for local reasons like the death of a joyrider in a police chase. The main interest in the anti-CIP movement is the way in which this poor, marginalized, element, who normally struggle in an "apolitical" way, responded to this cut in the minimum wage with their exemplary violence.

himself. For those who reduce men and women to images and objects, the objects appear to have all the human qualities, and the human manifestations change into barbaric ignorance. Those who directly attack capitalism's most visible aspect, also its most respected, are thus denounced and isolated with all the strength of the great hypnotic forces backing up the police. Meanwhile it returns them the honor of bringing out in broad daylight the usually invisible face of the monopoly of legal violence that maintains the social order. When marginalized people start breaking shop windows and announce in their actions the end of the reign of money and cops, THEY ARE ONLY REVEALING THE SECRET OF THEIR OWN IMMEDIATE EXISTENCE, because they represent the effective end to this order, and they see in their own situation the concrete summation of their devaluation by commodity society. So what's a Lacoste shirt or a pair of Cheignon shoes worth when the poor themselves are worthless, as they're endlessly made to understand? Let do-gooders pour their crocodile tears on the looting of Lacoste and whatever luxury boutiques, which are a permanent provocation to the poverty millions of people struggle under. The mayor of Lyon can come to comfort the shopkeepers; he himself has looted millions in public funds. The fish rots from the head, as the saying goes. There's the backlash of the irony with which this world is also provoking its breaking point.

But the looting also shows the most succinct application of the misguided idea, "to each according to their own false needs" - needs determined and produced by the system. The looters mustn't remain prisoners of arbitrary forms that take on all images of their false needs. One shouldn't underestimate the possible future police provocations, but power also manipulates and tricks itself, always disguising its political cunning, its lack of social intelligence.

The revolution starts... where the perennial whining about the "right to work" ends, where the marches with no other perspective but the electoral profit of recuperators come to a halt, when we grasp the importance and the sense of our actions.

This society has no hope and no future and we all more or less confusedly know it. THAT'S WHY THIS SOCIETY MUST GO! We aren't carrying any truths on a silver platter. We have no ambitions other than to contribute to the movement, to help it find the reasons for what it's already done, and to go beyond what it has yet to accomplish. No one has the magic recipe for life, but we can, like the schoolkids, start to lift the veil... The spring is lovely already...

*Some workers and unemployed*

# Let's Turn Things Around

Have all these riots broken out of the deadly isolation separating people from community? An uprising against this isolation has an infinite volume because human beings are infinitely more than citizens of the State and human life infinitely more than an economic calculation.

The “youth wage” has become the pretext for a profound revolt among young people. Devalued and rejected before they've even entered “the work world,” young people in colleges, high schools and suburbs are faced with massive unemployment. They already know there's no future for them in this society. THEY ARE MADE WORTHLESS BECAUSE IN THE MODERN ECONOMY THEIR HUMANITY HAS NO MARKET VALUE. While the elite has perfectly integrated the successful ones, in reality they are proving themselves to be failures, after 20 years of being bombarded with images of conditioned happiness. Huge groups of people in the suburbs, the inner cities, and the country, the young and the old are rejected because their labor power is no longer a valuable commodity. They're excluded from social life by unemployment, isolation, poverty, drugs, prison, suicide, and if need be, war. Many no longer accept to work for this organization of misery, which is making it more and more difficult to find work. Their work no longer makes sense. It no longer corresponds directly to human needs, but serves the insane expansion of consumption and creates a more and more artificial and inhuman order of things. Work wastes incredible amounts of energy in the production of useless objects that destroy the environment. But it is especially the reproduction of the entire mind-crushing machine, the reproduction of all the relationships that imprison life inside bought and paid-for space and time. Meanwhile, a general idiocy continues to demand an “economic recovery,” an “economic start-up,” when it's precisely the economic mindset that rejects, excludes, and destroys social connections. Some propose, with a straight face, the “abolition of unemployment,” when it's wage-labor and money that need to be abolished!

The social movement emerging today can be sunk by media reflections and political cooptations. The State's responses already demonstrate the contemptible limits of what you can gain on the economic level. That's where the political rackets rule, each party, from the left to the right, finding the cause of all problems in the fact that its competitor is currently running the government. The left, which is once more trying to snuggle up with the opposition, the left in power [Mitterand's Socialist Party] who for 10 years had remounted individual success, economic liberalism, and easy money at the stock exchange and elsewhere, had already gotten Balladur's job well under way, with the TUC, the SIVP's, the CES's, and slashing unemployment compensation. And how many wage capitulations have the unions signed?

This movement must go beyond politics. It has to raise the real social question: the revolt against the commodity, commodified humanity, the worker/consumer hierarchically subjected to economic dictates, where everyone is taken charge of and must identify their needs and desires with those of the totalitarian spectacle. The irrationality of this rational and technological world is in separating people according to an allegedly inevitable objectivity, which results in extreme social differentiations, in roles, specializations and racisms. The isolated individual becomes a stranger to others and

## I.

# Analyses of the Revolt

# Nantes in Their Pants

## The Minimum Wage Agitation in Nantes, March-April 1994

### *A Foretaste*

On February 4, 1994, in Rennes, angry fishermen from all over Brittany came to battle the riot cops (the CRS). Eduard Balladur, the Prime Minister was in town. Many local people joined them, and also people from Nantes who'd heard about the riot on the radio (the two cities are only 100 kilometers apart). The fighting lasted all day. The resolutely determined demonstrators used maritime landing rockets (with grappling hooks and cables, fired at the shore to connect boats to the docks) and emergency flares against the riot cops. The press spoke of "unprecedented violence" the likes of which had never been seen - "not even in May '68." The next day, the CRS took legal action against their employers, while their officers demanded measures be taken for the "forces of order" to be better protected! These mercenaries, accustomed to beating up defenseless demonstrators with impunity, discovered that others can be just as brutal as they can. Shock and panic: "CRS FEAR URBAN GUERRILLAS" ran Ouest-France's exaggerated headline. Yet, of the 70 injured by the end of the day, only 7 were CRS. One of the demonstrators had a hand mangled by what the press called a "bomb." There were plenty of broken bones. "War wounds," one doctor put it. 4 rioters were arrested: 2 fishermen and 2 unemployed people from Rennes (Ouest-France didn't hesitate to write, "2 fishermen and 2 'hooligans!"), and tried the next day. All four were sent down, but the two unemployed got it the worst (4 months each).

That night, the "Breton Parliament" burned. An historic building in the center of Rennes, it had served as the court of appeals. The fire was probably started by an emergency flare landing in the attics. The next day, a cortege of public figures and prominent Bretons gaudily launched a donation campaign for the "restoration of the Breton Parliament." Ouest-France spoke of "reconstructing the community-of-interests wounded by the violent madness which suddenly came over a few desperate people," appealing to readers to fork out cash. The local government promised to use vast amounts of public funds "to rebuild the symbol of Brittany." "It really makes me mad," a fisherman's wife wrote in to Ouest-France, "to see how ten million francs were immediately earmarked for the parliament, while we had to fight, we had to scream as loud as we could for anybody to deign to listen to us. Of course, that old pile of rubble is priceless, but are people any less so? (...) I hope our lives will be rebuilt as quickly as the parliament building." Her letter was signed: "A future homeless person." In fact, this fundraising campaign, which was especially trying to discredit the rioters, fell flat. The idea that unrelenting revolt is more effective than undignified begging was becoming widespread. The memory of the fishermen's brave attack would be a powerful presence in the demonstrations of March-April. (Only lacking the maritime rockets!)

### *Aperitifs*

never stop hitting us over the head with sacrifices, that every salary or personal income not in excess of 25,000 francs per month.

- We would like the people in this movement to have control over the press, TV, and radio. It is intolerable to see every single day, especially in the papers and on TV, the actions, opinions, and decisions of people in this movement covered up, slandered and twisted. It's mostly thanks to us that the media exists. It owes us some answers.
- We don't want the demos and assemblies to end up as springboards for leaders or political ideologies to advertise themselves. The celebrities, stars, or parties or unions or bosses, if they feel some sympathy toward this movement, should have no more chance to speak than each individual according to their own abilities. We don't want to be taken for sympathisers or adherents for whichever group.

It would take a whole movement to put these ideas into action. But we hope they will be discussed as widely as possible.

*A few workers (either unemployed, on welfare, or no steady job)*

# Our Propositions

We are either unemployed, on welfare, part-time or temporary workers. Like lots of other people (students, “marginals,” or full-time workers), we're overjoyed to see the beginning of the end of a long period of apathy, isolation, and blackmail, which has pretty much been able to keep us quiet, getting us to swallow worsening living conditions, claiming it was the poorest who had caused this situation, setting people against each other.

We aren't involved any unions or parties. We have no desire to be extras in organizations who only look after their own cliquish interests, not ruling out manipulation, lying, and acting against the always legitimate grassroots movements on which they feed.

With all this protesting going on in France right now, we can finally breathe. And we know we're not the only ones who feel that way. It also lets us say out loud what many, many people, like us, could only say in our little groups always relating our gripes over and over.

We want to seize on the present moment to put forward these ideas, propositions, demands and grievances for a debate which, we hope, will grow out of them:

- Repeal of the 5-year employment law, and all the previous laws that have worsened our working conditions, social security, housing, living conditions, etc.
- We demand the reversal of all convictions and immediate freedom for everyone who's been arrested or convicted in the demonstrations - from the riots in the suburbs as well as the anti-CIP demos. These expressions of anger are legitimate and respectable. While politicians meddle with millions and grant themselves amnesty, these people accused of having thrown rocks and broken a few windows are sentenced to up to six months in jail. We cannot accept, as has happened already in Nantes and Lyon, that people driven by the same anger as ours be prosecuted and imprisoned.
- We don't need work, we need money. We know from experience, being unemployed, that the jobs that have been forced on us, which we are usually forced to take under threat of losing our rights (in other words our money) are badly paid, usually beneath our dignity, and temporary, making us into throw-away human resources. Automation, especially for the frenzied productivity speed-up in the last few years, has gotten rid of lots of jobs and made a lot of profits. We want money so we can live well.
- When the senators talk concretely about the economic crisis, the social security deficit, and other abstractions, the same day they passed the CIP bill, voted themselves a 20% raise, some bosses make hundreds of thousands of francs per month, the financiers rake it in by the billions, huge sums are invested in the prestigious state companies, etc. It would be at least “in solidarity,” since the rich

Since autumn, a “fever,” as the newspapers put it, had been building on the Nantes University campus. Protests took place against the lack of housing, professors, grants, and against the generous subsidies given to the private sector. These protests led some people to reflect more generally on the entire system producing these conditions. Several groups at the heart of the unrest started spreading ideas more critical of the dominant social organization than the kind blandly droned out by the unions or “opposition” politicians, and they found a growing audience. Among them was a group called SCALP (the “Out-and-out Anti-Le Pen Faction”), who had begun to outgrow their one-track opposition to franco-fascism and take up cause against the social manure that fertilizes it. And also the “Virus Mutiny” group, who, since autumn 1992 launched several provocative interventions against the university authorities and the commodity society they represent. From the beginning of the second university semester, this critical movement began to intensify.

- On February 22, 1994,** 150 students occupied the university president's office to protest the low number of teaching jobs being handed out by the minister. 60 people held out until 3 in the morning. They demanded the right to take classes, even if they “without being able to pay.”
- On February 24,** the university administration was occupied by around 200 students. The police intervened, charging “recklessly.” The students were “driven back” toward the Lit. Dept.
- February 25.** 300 students again occupied the administration. They were protesting against “scarcity” and its counterpart, “the plot to turn universities into something only for the rich.” Added to this was the first denunciation of the “*smic jeunes*,” [minimum wage for youth, the CIP, lowering the minimum wage for those aged 25 and under] which had just come out in the press.
- On March 9,** students occupied the chamber of commerce building in downtown Nantes for quite a while. In it, they organized a general assembly, calling “unemployed, college and high school students, workers, and everybody upset about this social rollback” to join a demonstration the next day in front of the prefecture (main government administration building, including the police headquarters). One of their representatives declared that the “*smic-jeunes* is just one big tree in a forest of problems.”

These criticisms, arrived at in more and more public ways, couldn't help but find a favorable echo in other groups in the population, because they coincided with other struggles taking place:

- Some tough strikes were breaking out in local companies threatening to lay off all or part of their workforce (200 workers at Chantelle in Saint Herblain. 80 workers at Arno in Saint Nazaire) or threatening to harden their internal rules.
- Unemployed people were coming out of their isolation and passivity: on February 23rd, a collective gathered 400 people to occupy Nantes city hall demanding “emergency measures: the right to housing, and no disconnections of water, gas, electricity, or telephone...”

- And the marginalized youth of the *banlieue* - the suburbs, those modern, run-down housing estates on the outskirts of the big cities - answered back to the police harassment they are always the target of: the night of February 19th, 3 cops called out to deal with a noise complaint were “ambushed” in the Broissière neighborhood in Nantes. They were attacked by 20 youths and retreated, firing some shots “into the air.” A few days later, the 24th, a fight broke out in front of the justice building between the police and some youths who'd come to “support a buddy.”

All these grievances finally met in the street around the anti-CIP demonstrations, in the attack on the bastions of the State (the administration and justice buildings), and in the battles against the cops who defend them.

### *Main Course*

From the beginning of March, anti-CIP demonstrations spread throughout France. In Nantes, they grew from a few hundred protesters on March 10 to more than 25,000 on March 12th at a CGT demo. But they were still peaceful, while in other French cities, clashes with the police had started appearing. That was to change on March 17th. The night before, a few hundred students, “not calling themselves by any particular label,” gathered together in a general assembly and decided to join in the anti-CIP demo organized by the unions, but not just to passively “follow along.” (“The unions herd the cattle, Balladur provides the corral,” as some graffiti put it.) They applauded the unemployed Mémène, who declared, “We are all excluded. It's not enough to protest against the *smic-jeunes*: all laws are anti-social.”

On March 17th, 10,000 showed up at Nantes (and 8,000 in Saint Nazaire, a town 50 kilometers away, historically very close to Nantes). At 7 pm, when the march arrived at the State building, the CRS started throwing tear gas. Some people countered by throwing stones. The bulk of the demonstrators backed off, but 2,000 to 3,000 stood up to the cops. Among them you could notice some quite grown up “proles” wearing CGT or CFDT buttons. The courageous combatants resisted the police charges with hurled rocks (decorative gravel from the windowsill of a building), and burning mini-“barricades.” Their determination was impressive since, having almost nothing to defend themselves with, they barely hesitated to withstand the police attacks, even under clouds of teargas and concussion grenades. You got the sense that anger fed their strength. All their might was focused on a single target: the cops. Contrary to what the TV reported, there weren't any windows broken, except for one at a gun shop, whose rifles stayed out of reach behind bars on the inside, (But the image was exaggerated, exploited by the media as proof of the demonstrators' “violence.”) The tumult lasted nearly five hours. There were 20 arrests and 60 injuries.

The next day, March 18th, a few hundred students voted to strike to express their “disgust with the police repression.” They rallied in front of the police headquarters, demanding the liberation of their detained “comrades.” Stopped by a heavy cordon of CRS, they managed to get around it, and were joined by other spontaneous demonstrators - mostly high school students - in front of the prefecture. Now

## The Lamb, the Wolf, and the Police Dog...

### *A fable for the flock*

While you march like sheep watched over by your union keepers, some youth, with only stones for weapons, are taking on the armed police, and pushing forward your demands. They are taking by force what you are begging for like slaves. But what they are trying to achieve is not the right to survival, but that of living fully, without waiting... What they take back from department stores is what is stolen from us legally, every day, by the political and economic elite. You're too meek... Today's shepherds are leading you off a cliff, and when you see the wolf, proud and free, ready to devour your masters, you only bleat in fright. When the police dogs bark out the orders of the herders, you bleat contentedly and get back in line. Tomorrow, at the great European barbecue, they'll slit your throats without scruples. They'll feast on your flavorless flesh while the jackal politicians clean your bones. Still, the rich are nervous. They're afraid the flock might break out of the social sheepfold. Today, domesticated animal. Tomorrow, wild and free! Solidarity with the rioters!



# Work? When There Are So Many Better Things to Do!?!?

*A few urgent, realistic, and minimal steps for resolving the current jobs crisis.*

1. STOP begging the bosses and the State for the right to wage slavery. Until we get rid of this need to ask them to organize our life, we will depend on their good will, and they will continue to treat us like surplus commodities.
- 2 STOP believing you have to earn a living. We're already living life; we just need to make it worth living. There's an abundance of the things we need for survival; the only question is how to distribute them. The machines to produce them exist; the only question is how to put them to use. What to make, and how to share it?
3. MAKE a complete list of all the useless and dangerous objects, tools, buildings, and monuments with which production is forced on us in the name of the blackmail that is work, and proceed to destroy them.
4. SEIZE goods wherever they are, and let them no longer be commodities. That is, redistribute them freely to anyone who needs or desires them.
5. MOVE into empty buildings and fix them up, while getting ready to occupy the millions of square feet of luxurious housing only used a few days out of the year.
6. BREAK the computer defenses and eliminate the barriers that keep us from traveling and communicating freely. As you can see, there's plenty to do. Let's roll up our sleeves!

*Friends of Paul Lafargue*

numbering more than 3,000, they marched through the streets chanting, "No to slavery," "Balladur, scumbag," "CRS, SS," and "Pasqua, you're dead - the people will have your head." Then they headed for the train station and blocked the tracks for almost two hours. At the same time, 2,500 demonstrators marched spontaneously in Saint Nazaire.

The deputy mayor of Nantes, Jean-Marc Ayrault, a "socialist," announced, "I understand young people's concern," but asked them to be careful that "their movement not be led astray by provocateurs or irresponsible people." The "Communist" Party spoke of "little groups of hooligans who the Party rigidly denounces," while the National Front (Le Pen's racist/"fascist" party) talked about "urban guerrillas" led by "ethnic gangs." To all these slanderous lies, the demonstrators answered, "There's only one hooligan: the State and its lackeys."

On Saturday, March 19th, 11 arrestees were tried at top speed, while several hundreds show their support in and outside of the court. The make-up of this group of accused people is in itself a critique of the manipulative lie about "hooligans," but it also says a lot about the unity among the rioters in the streets: 6 were unemployed, on welfare, or without income; one high school student, along with one college student, one "technician," and two trainee workers. 8 were between 19 and 25 years old, two are 36 and 37, and the last: 60 years old. Their sentences ranged from 900 francs (US \$180) to 6 months in jail. Again, the poorest of the bunch got hit the hardest. With the announcement of the sentences, the striking students, many unions, and some organizations of the unemployed called a demo for Monday the 21st.

On the afternoon of the 21st, an assembly of about 1,000 students, meeting in the Lit. Dept., voted for a general strike, demanding "the unconditional withdrawal of the smic-jeunes, the lifting of all convictions, and the removal from office of Ohrel (chief of police) and of Pasqua (minister of the interior)." A call went out for all "students, workers, and unemployed people" to join the movement. On the evening of the 21st, 4,000 people demonstrated, putting forward the same demands. Lots of people rallied around a banner reading "Neither judges nor prisons will stop our rebellion." In front of the State building, the unions' demo monitors formed a barrier and called for the crowd to disperse, but, due to its size, were quickly outnumbered. They started getting pushed around and insulted (an old worker matter-of-factly informed a CGT goon his same age: "These kids here, you're not going to fuck them over like you did in '68."). They quickly left ("with dignity") calling for the crowd to follow them. Nobody moved. At least a thousand demonstrators fought the CRS until midnight, first in front of the courthouse and then the prefecture. 17 arrests.

The next day, March 22nd, starting at 7:30 am, the Lit. Dept. was occupied by the strikers. In the afternoon, the general assembly couldn't be held in there because it wasn't big enough. The main amphitheater in the neighboring Law Building was taken over, despite the protests of law students and professors who wanted to "work." This assembly was not at all strictly students: it included a number of workers, unemployed people, and "others," and stayed that way to the finish. It distinguished itself nicely from other assemblies observed over the last 20 years or so by the smoothness of its debates. This was no place to let off steam: the discussions were impassioned but calm, and didn't go off on tangents. Apart from one or two, people didn't speak just for the pleasure of hearing their voices. They paid attention to what others said. A distinct maturity was seen in some very young people. Mainly, they tried to come up with something concrete.

One anecdote is enough to give a picture of this atmosphere. A participant read to the hall the draft of a communiqué. He'd hardly gotten through two lines when the crowd gave him a standing ovation. "Settle down," he told them, "you can congratulate me later." Everybody laughed, and listened through to the end. The proposed communiqué was quickly and unanimously approved. Another time, there was a debate on the need for march stewards or monitors for the next demo. "This is an intelligent and responsible movement and everyone knows what they're doing..." someone argued, "and if it isn't creating our own police force won't change anything." The assembly agreed. It refused to create a march monitor committee as the movement in other cities had done, in charge of keeping the so-called "hooligans" out of the demos. It decided instead to form a protection committee, which would provide supplies (goggles against tear gas, anti-eye irritant, etc.) and defend demonstrators against attacks (from the police or anyone else). In fact, this committee never materialized, since everyone defended themselves together.

On March 22, the assembly took note of the clear progress of the rebellion. They strongly affirmed the need to extend the movement beyond the single demand for the CIP's retraction. Calls to open the occupied faculty to all were fervently applauded. The congregation decided to demonstrate the next day in front of the palace of justice where the 8 arrested on Monday were to be tried.

At the end of this meeting, some workers (and workless) who had met there drew up, on the corner of a table, a tract which would be distributed on leaflets and posters the next day: "We have participated in the occupation of the faculty of Nantes, today, March 22 (appropriate date! \*), 1994, because we think the struggle begun against the CIP is evolving toward a much deeper agitation against all the causes of marginalization, poverty, and exploitation in today's society. We think this struggle needs to move beyond the student milieu and its self-limiting, corporatist demands. Workers who want to join it should be able to express themselves and act outside the dictates of unions or any other organization. The best thing for everybody (workers, unemployed, students, etc., who wants to challenge the reigning order of things) would be to meet face to face and organize themselves directly, without mediators. We have therefore decided that the occupied faculty building is open to anyone who agrees with these perspectives. We invite you to come here, and, with us, figure out how to carry out the struggle." They signed it, "The Committee to ANTI-CIPate the Future."

Two days later, their second tract elaborated on the first: "In struggling against the smic-jeunes, many young people have understood that it's only one of many laws that favors, with the threat of unemployment, the increased exploitation of workers. Their revolt, reinforced by the repression the State has launched against it, is extending itself to a general questioning of this social organization where increasing impoverishment and marginalization maintain the privileges of a tiny handful of bosses, and where the production of abundance relies on the dispossession of its producers. Their determination, which is pulling French society out of its lethargy, shows that the critique of these conditions and the search for ways to radically transform society are possible, as long as they don't let themselves get trapped in the debate already rigged by the politicians. But if the State succeeds in keeping it locked into the limited framework of a student movement with the CIP as a single issue, if, using the "hooligans" as a scarecrow, they are able to cut it off from the rest of the population and divide it against itself, this resolution will be wiped out by the fatigue, internal conflicts, and confusion that go

with the superphoenix, sell tons of adulterated food, and sack the employee who eats fruit that was going to be thrown out, flood the beaches with explosives, etc., etc.

The real "hooligans" are the interchangeable politicians exploiting people's gullibility to get elected as managers of "public" affairs, where they butter their bread underneath the table. They abuse the "citizens" they're supposed to represent with rapacious laws. They are the same ones who turn thousands of children into foreigners on the soil where they were born and tear apart families and couples with brutal deportations. They're the ones who defend liberty with banishment, fines, and imprisonment - and the ones pay them and "cover for" them. The real "hooligans" are the mercenary gangs who beat, strangle, maim, mutilate and kill - and the ones who give them their orders.

Those are the real "hooligans." The others, whom the language "hooligans" try to defame with that name today, are nothing more than the logical outcome of the situation created by the former; rebellious spirits still *very moderately* retaliating against the violence they've been subject to from day one, under ever more sophisticated "modern" forms. And this bluff, turning the truth upside down to try to condemn them to public outrage, has the single aim of isolating them to better wipe them out. That is, if others also victimized by the ruling powers, don't compare their grievances with the "hooligans" and band together with them to *change the social system that is the cause of it all*. But who can still be hoodwinked by this kind of manipulating pabulum, the favorite trick of nervous rulers?

We smile to see submissiveness fading and anger re-taking the streets. The atmosphere these days should, we hope, dissolve the mists of this teargas for the mind and nourish healthier instincts than those of the flocks of ostriches who only make the ministers happy. The Nantesians who went down to confront the cops, demanding the release of people arrested in the recent riots, set an example that warms the heart. We hope it be taken up everywhere, that all the exploited people they're trying to divide will know how to unite and take up again the spirit of their ancestors, the communards, who, hearing that they were called "the rabble" by their enemies, proudly replied, "They are the rabble, and I am one of them!"

It's no offense to be called a "hoodlum" by these bastards. Those who were "all German Jews" in 1968, and who all had "mental AIDS" in 1986 wouldn't be upset about being "hooligans" today in the eyes of those who despair of being able to go on abusing people at their leisure. They, the real "hooligans" of humanity, the masters of deception, know that their set-up has been exposed and could be taken apart if only their victims would set about the task with sufficient venom. We understand why they have recourse to every kind of slander and low blow in their attempt to hang on to their power. But there's no guarantee that will work forever. It's not some impregnable Bastille!

*Insurrectionary "hooligans" defense committee. Nantes, March 20, 1994*

## *We Have Found the “Hooligan” Factory*

For some years now we've been lost in conjecture. It used to be that protesters would always fight back against police harassment during demonstrations. But we see only good little demonstrators helplessly outflanked by the “hooligans.” Lately only the second aspect of this development has us stumped. It's hardly surprising that in times like these, when workers *keep working* when they go on strike, and the unemployed pay money to get a job, that demonstrators have become meek as lambs, kept in good order as they are by “responsible” organizations. But these “hooligans” who constantly overwhelm the peacefully marching honest supplicants - who are they? Where do they come from?

Everything seems to indicate that the “hooligans” have nothing in common with the demonstrators, whose spineless, whining submissiveness they discredit. Their demands as respectable as they are doomed to failure, are spoiled by the hooligans' violence. Well then? The question keeps coming up: the more the “hooligans” flourish and multiply, the more their origins and motives seem obscure.

Many times we'd thought to have unraveled the mystery. The TV had us drooling: they've caught some hooligans! We finally get to see them! But when the appointed time arrived, what did they show us? Some truck drivers, a few farmers, fishermen, some unemployed, some youth from the suburbs, even students! In fact, just a lot of angry people, hardly filling the part of boogey-men they were supposed to play. But the real “hooligan,” this monster ceaselessly evoked on our TV screens, in the papers, and on the steps of the Elysée (President's office) remains invisible. Where is it hiding?

The truth has bluntly showed its face - that's all just a distraction from the growing social discontent. We give it to you in all its naked glory. The real “hooligans,” while it's true that they are often led by occult forces, are not nearly so obscure as has been thought. Quite the opposite - they are all too visible. But they hide their heinous crimes behind the immensity of *false evidence* conceded by an omnipresent propaganda. They pass themselves off as constructive, progressive and benevolent - while they wreak incredible destruction and cause incalculable suffering.

The real “hooligans” are those strange people who are destroying the planet with their *barbarically* cynical “economic” decisions, the high priests of business who - under the pretext of human happiness - sacrifice millions of men, women, and children to the cult of “profitability.” They are the warlords of commerce, living off their subject peoples by extortion and plunder. They are the multinational mafia, planetary con men. They fight amongst themselves, but always cooperate when it comes to shearing weak sheep or bleeding stubborn oxen under the yoke. They are experts in the art of earning their bread from the sweat of other people's brows. They know all the rackets to squeeze more work out of people who have no means of subsistence other than to sell their labor power in an overcrowded market that permits all kinds of blackmail. And they have mastered all the techniques to get rid of the lemons after they've been pressed, without which there would be too many bad seeds.

The real “hooligans” are the hyenas who sell contaminated blood for a quick profit, poison nature with all sorts of toxins, all the while using it up and paving it over. They build flimsy houses in flood zones, or give the authorization for it. They play roulette

along with repression. And the opportunity it gives us now, to escape our isolation and act together, will be lost. That's why we call on all workers and unemployed to join us without delay and give this movement the power it's still lacking. We hope that, in joining this movement, everyone who has fought against the rotten hand they've been dealt: workers and people who've been laid off, fishermen, farmers, truck drivers, miners, etc., will find their second wind and the alliance that's been missing in their struggles.” This was followed by some concrete propositions. These two tracts were easily approved by many assembly participants, and became widely circulated. Meanwhile, the “Committee to ANTI-CIPate the Future, free association of individuals for a radical end to the social malaise” an ad hoc group that came together on the spot, seeing that it was on essentially the same level as the rest dissolved itself into the assembly just as spontaneously as it was born out of it.

There was a big party on campus the night of March 24th, with rock bands playing. It lasted until early the next morning, lit up by a big bonfire of tables and chairs pulled out of class rooms.

On the morning of March 23. the assembly, with increased numbers, decided to continue the strike and occupation. A few professors declared their solidarity. A demo was called for the 24th, before the national one on the 25th. That afternoon, 1,000 demonstrators met in front of the palace of justice. The 8 defendants were first subjected to a show hardly resembling the principles of official “democracy,” designed to help the prosecution: at the opening of the process, they were presented to the press handcuffed in the defendant box. The “independent” boogey-men thus showed that they know very well the class interests they serve, But they showed it a little too well, and even their bosses who they wanted to please found themselves forced to get them under control. The 8 defendants were sentenced to fines, community service (the modern descendant of the forced labor of our ancestors - less crude but in the same detestable spirit), and one to three months in jail. As before, they slapped the heaviest sentences on the poorest unfortunates: the two jobless guys.

The night of March 23rd-24th, the Dean of the University closed the Lit. Dept. building under the pretext of safety concerns. The occupation immediately moved to the Law Dept., which had a non-striking majority. To keep classes from taking place, it was emptied of its furniture. The assembly proceeded to demand that the Lit. Dept. be reopened, and “should remain an open meeting place.” For their part, 76 teachers and university employees also demanded its reopening, the withdrawal of the CIP and the lifting of all charges - but only the sociology department joined the strike. The other professors, in an equivocating communiqué typical of the duplicity of intellectual functionaries, found it “impossible to carry out classes.”

The assembly unanimously approved a communiqué slating, among other things, “First of all, our movement is autonomous. We don't work for political parties, whether in or out of state power. The general assembly knows that its autonomy and democracy are its strong points. (...) Further, we denounce the portrait that's been painted of us and of people we've joined in the struggle. The term 'hooligan' is meaningless. Its only purpose is to slander us, and make people afraid of this movement. We know that demonstrators' violence is only a response to the violence they submit to every day in the conditions they live under. That's why we're in solidarity with them. If the word 'hooligan' means anything, the only real 'hooligans' are the ones who, through their

political and economic decisions. destroy the lives of millions with unemployment, marginalization, casualization, poverty, and repression.”

That morning, workers at Arno, a bankrupt ship repair company in state repossession (being nationalized), launched an unlimited strike, multiplying the protest actions taking place. They blocked the St. Nazaire bridge and piled burning tyres in front of city hall, announcing they'd join the next two days' demonstrations.

**MARCH 24.** 10,000 on the streets of Nantes. At 6 pm, street lighting began against the CRS, lasting until 3 am. Some rioters tried to attack a police station closed for the night, but were stopped by a charge from the CRS. The gun store window, already smashed once before, got hit again (still no threat to its contents), and for the first time, a dozen other shop windows got broken. This was more a way for people to let off steam - feeling powerless against the CRS - than for looting (they only attacked a few temporary employment offices and a pizzeria!). There were 23 arrests, some a long time after the riot by cops out on “search and destroy” missions.

**MARCH 25.** The national demo drew 20,000 in Nantes and 9,000 in St. Nazaire, including lots of workers out on strike or struggling in other ways (Chantelle, Arno, Waterman). The unions purposefully announced the march's dispersion far from the prefecture, but that didn't prevent 2 or 3,000 demonstrators from showing up there around 8 o'clock. The cops were restrained, staying inside the building or far enough away outside. People sang and danced around a bonfire built out of boards from a construction site. That lasted over an hour, and then the CRS intervened, brutally. They charged through all the streets at once, dividing the revelers into little groups, which led to dispersed street fighting spread throughout downtown. This again lasted until the very early morning, the last rioters being pushed back to Rue Franklin Roosevelt, where it proved impossible to rout the cops' massive charges. This time, 80 people got nabbed, but they only ended up pressing charges on 31 of them. The local press noted that “as in the previous nights' violence, the profiles of the arrestees didn't correspond to the hooligan 'model': lots of students, lots of unemployed, but also a sailor, a gravestone cutter, a handicapped person, etc.” It was pretty obvious that the hooligan “model” was never anything more than a red herring. As one leaflet put it (“We have found the 'hooligan' factory”), it's impossible to find these “hooligans” anywhere but in the words of politicians and their media accomplices. They're decoys, chimeras, who turn into plain old rebellious citizens when they're caught.

**MARCH 28.** Balladur announced the CIP's “suspension” for one week. Everyone laughed. The national demo was still on for Thursday. The Lit. Dept. students kept on with the strike, finally joined by the science students. Only the law students started protesting against the occupation, which was keeping them from “working” ...to become the prosecutors, judges, and bailiffs of tomorrow.

**MARCH 29.** The Nantes architecture school and a college in St. Nazaire joined the strike. Some tech school students blocked freeway entrances, inviting drivers to give them support. They collected 12,000 Francs (US \$2400) over the course of the day. Some high school kids offered Q-tips to passers-by (“to unplug the government's ears”) in exchange for donations. They got 5000 Francs (US \$1000) in one afternoon in a single Nantes neighborhood. These hefty donations attest to the support a lot of people had for the movement. Many people met that day in front of the factories in industrial areas where people were striking or in some kind of dispute (Chantelle, Waterman), and

### III.

## Leaflets Handed Out at Anti-CIP Demos

police, who they said wouldn't do anything to the suspects because they were white. If they had been Arabs, Turks, or Chinese, they wouldn't have been released. In fact, however, they weren't released. In this heated context, reality doesn't count anymore. Any rumor, however absurd, can set off wildfires.

In Corbeil-Essonnes, the arrest of some young thieves of the city of Tarterets, under suspicion of having robbed a pharmacy three times, provoked an attack on the police station during the night. In this "new town," as in many others, police cars are being smashed on a regular basis. Some three weeks ago, one of those cars even received a manhole cover, dropped from the seventh floor.

In Avignon on March 5th, the murder of a young Moroccan gave rise to vandalism, looting, and confrontations with the police. The perpetrators: two of his young cousins from North Africa. But the rioters demolished the downtown, denouncing immediately this "racist crime." In Rouen, on January 26th, the death of a young man from Senegal, driving with two friends in a stolen vehicle, and killed by the police, who tried to do a routine ID check on them, provoked a week of rioting.

Dozens of identical examples indicate how explosive the situation in the suburbs is, and how it calls for urgent solutions. But, to extinguish this smoldering social fire, the police and the firefighters are not enough. A multi-sided urban policy needs to be put in place, as demonstrated in the paper "Security and Democracy," by the specialists of the European Forum for Urban Security.

the employment agencies. The impromptu debates and discussions on social questions began to multiply.

**MARCH 30.** The economics department joined the strike. Streets in Nantes, St. Nazaire, and another local town were blocked all day by "informational" pickets of high school and college students. The local press noted that "on the whole," public opinion supported the demonstrators. At the end of the day, a few hundred gathered in front of the prefecture, leaving after an hour. That night, Ballardur announced the CIP's withdrawal.

**MARCH 31.** The planned national demo was heralded in the media as a "victory celebration." But the workers/students/unemployed assembly declared in a communiqué that this was only the "first victory. For too long, the logic of social and economic decisions has been to make workers and young people pay for the crisis. We have to impose other choices. We have to keep the pressure on." Their demands: The cancellation of all convictions and all sentences. Amnesty for all arrestees. The two Algerian youths returned to their families. The abolition of the Five Year Law. Concrete measures to reduce the workweek and create jobs. Decent wages for all." Lots of people who'd joined the assembly in the course of the month's demos considered it out of the question to stop there. Their opinion was clear from the title of one of their leaflets: "The CIP is dead. You ain't seen nothin' yet." This demo attracted more than 20,000. You couldn't tell from their slogans the movement was over: "The CIP is gone. our future hasn't arrived!," "The government retreated, we're moving forward!," "No casualization!," "Free our comrades!," and the ever-popular "Don't share jobs, smash capitalism!."

Around 8 o'clock, 2 or 3,000 people, having refused to go home "victoriously" (hailed in advance by a leaflet entitled "Go home!" handed out during the demo) gathered in front of the prefecture. Eggs and stones started flying. The rioters used a park bench as a ram in an attempt to batter down the doors. The cops charged the same way as the 25th, rushing down all the streets and breaking up the crowd into little groups. But a few regroupments were made here and there, moving to the chant of "This is only the beginning - we're gonna keep on fighting!" (Music to the ears of the unrepentant veterans of May '68 in the crowd. That had been one of *their* slogans.) The street fighting kept on 'til all hours of the night. For the first time, the CRS brought out a water cannon mounted on an armored car. But they must've had orders to "play it cool," because although the fighting was pretty extreme, nobody got arrested.

**APRIL 1.** The assembly in the Lit. Dept. voted to carry on the strike and occupation until Wednesday, when the next assembly was scheduled. But the law students voted to go back to classes. Meanwhile, the unions called a demo for the following Thursday, to demand "the abolition of the Five Year Law and the dropping of all charges against anti-CIP demonstrators."

**APRIL 5.** A big group of students wanting to go back to classes came to the general assembly. But, after a stormy debate, the majority voted to continue the strike/occupation until Friday. It adopted the following communiqué: "While it seems that, under pressure from the streets, the government has given up its precious CIP, its desire to attack and push back social progress remains the same. The Five Year Law is yet another action in favor of the corporations, without caring about the heavy costs to workers and future generations. Far from working against the growing casualization, this

Five Year Law is doing everything it can to accentuate it. So far, the government's only response to these social problems has been violence. We continue to demand: amnesty for all arrestees, the immediate return of the deported Algerians, the resignation of the prefect, and the minister of the interior, the annulment of the Five Year Law, and convincing measures against unemployment and poverty (minimum income for all, and a real sharing of the available work with no lost wages).” It called for active participation in the April 7th demo. But despite the rhetoric, it was pretty clear to the 2-3.000 assembly die-hards, half of whom weren't students, that they wouldn't have much leverage if the students (30,000 of the buggers in the whole university, 13,000 in the Lit. Dept. alone) demanded a return to routine en masse.

**APRIL 6.** A dispute erupted between the strikers and the straights who want a return to order. Some punches and a few chairs got thrown. The dean decided to suspend classes until Friday to avoid “difficult situations.” In Nantes itself, the premises of a former unemployment office were occupied by around 100 people: homeless, unemployed, workers, and students, organized by the “solidarity group for the casualized.” A banner hung on the outside of the building proclaimed: “Let's share the wealth and live a different way, with or without jobs.”

**APRIL 7.** The unions had called the demo for... 10 am, on a weekday! A good way to contribute to the movement's downturn while pretending to support it, the same thing unions have been doing for 50 years! Despite everything, 5,000 people turned up (4,000 in St. Nazaire). The demo took place and ended peacefully, but in the heart of it a small leaflet had been handed out, saying only, “10 am - typical union demo. Afternoon - free time, 7 pm - meet back at the prefecture. *Cassons Gaiment les Tyrans.*” (“Happily Smashing the Tyrants,” using the acronym for the Stalinist union, the CGT.) At 7 pm, only a hundred people showed up at the prefecture. Apparently, the announcement didn't get distributed well enough. They blocked the intersection in front of the building for a few hours, facing a CRS contingent almost bigger than they were, who seemed to be awaiting orders. Some demonstrators left, others got there late. The situation dragged on. It got chilly. Little by little, the crowd thinned out. Finally, the CRS charged. Most of the remaining protesters sought refuge in a sympathetic cafe nearby. The cops surrounded the cafe, forcing the owner to open it and everybody to come back out, checking their IDs. They finally decided to take in two people who they claimed to recognize from previous nights. One was let go after being beat up, the other held.

**APRIL 8.** What could be seen on the horizon for the last week finally arrived: a crowd of pro-normality students came to the general assembly. Most came for the first time, and while some ended up deciding to continue the struggle in other ways, most were more like sheep in a hurry to get to the slaughterhouse. A small handful of racists from the right-wing student organization UNI started a fistfight.

But the pro-strike faction proved they weren't the “dictators” their opponents accused them of being. They called right away for a vote on the continuation of the strike, while it was pretty obvious they'd lose. But they'd already stated clearly that everybody who wanted to keep going shouldn't let this vote stop them. After the vote, 1,000 to 1,500 people (including some who hadn't struck) continued the assembly in the same hall. They reiterated the demands of April 5th, and started working on various projects to promote them. disproving in advance the evening news' triumphant announcement that “Nantes, the last bastion of the protest movement, has fallen.”

## *“Reality doesn't count anymore... police cars are being smashed on a regular basis.”*

*In this brief article from Le Point, a big-time weekly French news magazine, we can observe several sides of the contemporary class struggle. First, the fact of the sporadic rioting taking place in the suburbs leading up to and during the time of the anti-CIP movement, yet superficially unrelated to it. The involvement of the more riot-inclined segment of the population in the anti-CIP demos was clearly not uniquely caused by the bill, but rather was a spill-over of a wave of dispersed suburban looting and burning that had already been taking place. Second, the way the media reporting is designed to confuse and obscure the facts, while at the same time giving them some air so they don't blow up. Most of these riots go unreported, but in the account here we can attempt to read through a blurry haze of semi-transparent lies and obscured facts:*

The mini-riots now happening at an accelerated pace in the suburbs represent a dangerous warning. The next stage could well be a vast inferno of the ghettos.

“We're pissed off!” In Garges-lès-Gonesse, Corbeil-Essonnes, and Rouen, as in all the suburbs where violence has broken out in the last few weeks, this cry has been like a leitmotiv in the rioters' mouths. The daily delinquency, punctuated by aggression, theft, and threats (with a background of numerous dealings, where that of drugs finds a growing place, and feeds a veritable underground economy) frequently in the housing projects gives rise to armed battles between gangs of “Zulus” and “Apaches.” (Derogatory, semi-racist terms for suburban youth - TN.) This often goes to the point of looting, which takes as its target big shopping malls, police stations, banks, public transport, and downtown centers.

When the police intervene against the hooligans, or even, as on Tuesday, at Garges-lès-Gonesse, to stop two youths suspected of murdering one of their comrades, they catalyze against themselves the violence of the public housing projects. Especially since the hardcore delinquents are very organized and know how to exploit to their benefit the atmosphere of despair. Quick to mobilize the black-white-arab youth of the projects against the police, who are systematically accused of racism, the gang leaders do their best to forbid to the police, and even to firefighters, access to their zones of influence, so as to do their business in peace.

The daily news of the last month has given us many examples.

The murder of Philippe Huyhn, 16-year-old resident of Garges-lès-Gonesse, killed on Monday by two bullets from a .22 long rifle, led to the swift arrest of two youths who admitted to the facts, at the same time talking about an accident. But this murder provoked, on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, violent incidents and impressive conflicts between dozens of youths and police.

Several police and firefighters were hurt, and about 15 cars were burned or damaged. Smashed windows, the windows of the police station, the post office, and the synagogue were reduced to powder by stones. Some of the police station's attackers explained that they wanted to free their arrested friends. Others spoke of taking revenge for Philippe Huyhn by killing one of the arrested suspects. Several denounced the attitude of the

**F:** No, I came to riot and loot. But not just anything. You loot a C & A [dept. store], or the stores for the “cherries” (the rich), the stars of the system. They're the ones we're after. You don't want to fuck up the little store owners.

**GH:** You're not afraid of the cops?

**F:** I watch out so I don't get nabbed. I stay with the crowd: leather jacket. keffiah, nothing identifiable. I followed the kids from the UNEF-ID who looted. The looters are just guys from the suburbs. You wouldn't think I'd be a looter: my dad's a journalist. Financially, we're fine.

**GH:** What are your motivations?

**F:** Since the Balladur government's been in power, between the police harassment, the youth wage, the Falloux law, the Nationality Code, and I don't know what... [indecipherable word - CAC]... there've been more and more cops in the street. I'm fighting against this repressive State.

**GH:** And what good does rioting do?

**F:** It keeps 'em from resting on their laurels. For years the leftists intellectuals have been thinking about how to change society. That's done nothing. Now, we need to move on to radical solutions. And that does do good. True, there is a fashion side to it... attacking journalists, particularly. Just by doing their job, they're taking sides. They grass us up to the cops and the RG [*Renseignements Generaux* - France's FBI - TN].

**GH:** Are young people in solidarity with each other?

**F:** Unfortunately, that's not possible because the guys from the suburbs don't have any political awareness. They only know the situation is rotten.

**GH:** Have you yourself directly fought the police?

**F:** Two undercover cops pulled up on the sidewalk in front of me. They hit me in the leg with their motorcycle, knocked me down. They approached me, pulled out their clubs and hit me, punched me, beat me, kicked me, just like a dog. They gave me the nigger treatment. Some people were going by, pureblood Gauls, who didn't like what the cops were doing to me. I'm glad they could see that. Even had to take some blows. If I get the chance to take one of them out, I won't hold myself back. We've got baseball bats and brass knuckles. They've got clubs and tear gas. Each side has its weapons. It's like the Palestinians and the Israelis, the Intifada. One side has rocks, the other side has rifles. That didn't prevent the homies from winning. We're gonna do the same. And if the rocks don't work, we're gonna try something else. Arms. Everybody who's against Balladur, the homeless, the workers, the youth can mobilize themselves. I've already got contacts with youth in the suburbs. It's starting.

**APRIL 13.** 2-300 came to the palace of justice to support the 13 demonstrators with cases being heard. After things dragged on all day, wearing the protesters out under the freezing rain, the court decided to reschedule the hearings for the 18th.

**APRIL 14.** The assembly called a demo for the 21st, with a tract entitled “Pasqua, don't be so happy - we're still here”: “Contrary to the triumphalist claims of the TV opinion-manipulators, 'the last bastion of the movement', has not 'fallen'. We, students, workers, and unemployed, continue our demands... and urge everyone who agrees to demonstrate with us.”

**APRIL 15.** Some movement people, throwing rotten eggs, broke up an official event where the police chief, the president and the mayor of Nantes were present.

**APRIL 21.** Some 200 people demonstrated at the palace of justice for the hearings of 7 arrestees. Their court dates got postponed. The atmosphere was pretty depressed. Their numbers had diminished considerably compared to how many there were when they planned the demo. A certain fatigue had set in. It seems the demo's time (determined by the court date) was poorly chosen. But the will to go on, while momentarily put off, wasn't totally crushed. In the discussions that took up the afternoon, they reckoned that the wave of spontaneous actions was over; it was time to focus on critical ideas and projects that the movement gave rise to. That didn't rule out tossing the occasional bomb.

**APRIL 22.** 3 demonstrators were arrested while carrying cases of eggs, after a group had tried to interrupt a ceremony where the *chouan* DeVilliers (an ultra-Catholic, extreme-right neo-royalist politician) was speaking, protected by a cordon of CRS. The cops finally charge them with “theft of eggs and attempt to resell.” (!?)

### *Dessert, Anyone?*

On the eve of May 1st, where this account leaves off, explosions of anger no longer beautify the streets, A straitjacket “calm” seems reestablished. But the sickening social situation remains. The unrest it has given rise to isn't dead either. Numerous strikes bear witness to it, and lots of discussions, too. People who'd met in the course of the movement know each other well enough to be able to keep doing things together. Cynical pessimism doesn't seem to be in order. Especially if you consider to what point an undeniable consciousness has developed in people's minds, that the ruling class has gotten much too accustomed to being able to push people around.

Rather than lament the apparent end of a rebellious upsurge, let's look on the bright side. The ruling class is worried. You can see it in the ridiculous reactions they've been having. This year, the traditional and innocuous Nantes Carnival has not been authorized to parade down the Boulevard of the 50 Hostages, “a place that's become symbolic of nighttime riots,” and it will not be allowed to finish as it usually does, with a burning effigy of the carnival king. The dangerous clowns who govern this society are aware how the grotesque carnival they preside over could also meet its end.

*“Gedicus” Nantes, April 29, 1994*

\* The student movement leading to the May '68 uprising was called the March 22 Movement.

## The View from Lyon

The CIP, unlike the 1986 Devaquet Bill, didn't come from the Department of Education but the Department of Labor. This is an important difference, because the whole society was symbolically affected through one measure which, while only directly concerned with the young, heralded a series of measures within the framework of a law on employment which continue to threaten a number of social protection laws inherited from the 1936 Popular Front government.

Despite these wide effects, the movement began with those most immediately effected, the IUT students. IUTs (Instituts Universitaires de Technologie) are 2-year post-high school technical schools producing qualified workers and managers, for whom the law was taken as high treason in regard to the "career plan" that had been flaunted at them, that job training and short-term studies would be their best bet for a job in the present climate. The CIP would have lowered their promised qualification and corresponding salary to the level of non-qualified work and the minimum wage. The reaction was immediate, especially in the IUTs around Paris, and took traditional, corporatist forms ("We didn't take all these classes just to end up at the same level as people who haven't done anything."), quickly related by the media, who hurried to locate some student "representatives" suitable to present for public consumption.

This initial opposition to the CIP was quickly taken up by protests in the high schools, especially militant outside of Paris. Their main characteristics can be described like this:

*A surprisingly spontaneity.* High school kids ditched classes at the slightest rumor of a downtown demonstration, blocking traffic there nearly every day. Little organization, and few links between high schools were visible, but you could see people converging toward "trouble spots," occupying certain strategic locations. These trouble spots (like the Place Bellecour in Lyon) were in themselves places of organization, coordination, and informal discussion. They were also the places where, in the absence of any clear plan for the next day, you were always sure to hook up with people looking for action. These trouble spots were, in Lyon, the departure point for the first violent conflicts with the police, who, it seems, understood their symbolic value.

*Unclear motives...* ...but interesting for that: the vagueness their position and possible opportunities led high school kids to take positions different from the IUT or BTS (like the IUT but more working class) students. For them, it wasn't a question of a career plan or corporatism, but instead a general anxiety about the future matched with a defiant attitude toward anything the State does. Under the influence of suburban ghetto youth, the CIP became a symbol of the hard times young people are having. However, this movement didn't come out of the same "youthism" of the 1980s, since the CIP was more or less clearly seen as, though definitely discriminatory against young people, also part of a block of measures linked to the bad employment situation in general. The fact that the CIP was included inside the Five Year Law on Employment left no doubt about it - at least for the people most active in the movement.

*High schools as a place of socialization and identity.* In a surprising way, the high schoolers who mobilized themselves did it somewhat independently of their individual "career paths" (type of studies, whether vocational or college-prep, etc.). Plenty of

## Interviews with "Hooligans"

*Globe Hebdo* (mainstream sensationalistic rag), March 29, 1994.

*"By rioting, we're doing the students' publicity."*

**SALVADOR:** 21 years old. Lives in Saint-Denis (suburb of Paris). Jobless.

**Globe Hebdo:** Who did you come to the demo with?

**S:** With the guys from my estate. We're starting to get used to these student demos. We know how you have to dress (jeans, basketball shoes, keffieh, dark sunglasses and a telephone cord for a weapon), and who you have to go with (guys with balls).

**GH:** Are you part of a gang, a union, or a political group?

**S:** Are you kidding or what? Have you taken a look at me? Personally, when I go "to the troubles" (to go rioting), it's only for me and my family. I don't give a fuck about the rest of 'em. You think the students give a fuck about what it's like to live in our estates? As for gangs, they're just the best way to adjust to conditions. So when I hear people talk about organized gangs, that pisses me off.

**GH:** So, you're not in solidarity with their cause?

**S:** We're helping each other, naturally. Let me explain. When the UNEF-ID organizes this kind of demo, we, by rioting, are doing their advertising. So it ends up that they are heard more and we go out with our arms full, and get to let off some steam. It does you good to beat up the cops. It changes something.

**GH:** What motivates you?

**S:** Pasqua. To me, he's an asshole. With his new laws on ID checks, he's not making life easy for *Beurs* (*beur* - slang word, now widely used, for second-generation Arab immigrants) or Blacks. There's also the show on Fun Radio. How can you have any trust for these bastards who beat up on partiers and cancel a radio show on the pretext that instead of saying "breast" they said "tit"? And after that young people should trust the Balladur government?

**GH:** Did you vote?

**S:** Yeah, at the last demo riot.

**GH:** What does the CIP mean to you?

**S:** For a guy like me, who's never been on unemployment, who's never worked - I always get along alright - the CIP doesn't mean a whole lot. Anyway, I think that more and more you really need to be able to do for yourself. If not, you end up homeless or in prison. So I don't even know exactly what the CIP says. I'm only interested in things that affect me like ID checks, the new penal code... I'll let the students figure out the rest.

*"We're going to take up arms."*

**FRANCK:** 21 years old, Parisian, second year history student.

**GH:** At Montparnasse, you didn't only come to demonstrate?



# Who Are the Hooligans?

*Paris Match*, April 7, 1994.

The time of the well-behaved demonstration is over. The number of incidents have increased alarmingly. Often, the student demonstrators have nothing to do with it. The “hooligans” infiltrate their demonstrations. Who are they? At the Ministry of the Interior, the experts have been sent to the blackboard. Here’s the police sketch of these demonstrators of the third kind. New fact: they are younger and younger. ***The great majority are less than 20 years old, and some are less than 15.*** Close to half of the judicial proceedings initiated after incidents during demonstrations involve a minor. A note, dated March 25 from the office of Marcel Leclerc, sub-prefect of law enforcement for Lyon, brought out these statistics on last weeks arrests in that city. It reveals that of 185 arrests made after incidents, 89 involved minors. One of them was only 13 years old. Sometimes repeat offenders are among them. In Lyon, some minors arrested two days earlier blatantly looting a store with smashed windows, were re-apprehended in the next demonstration. The profile of these young “provocateurs”? It defies every prejudice. ***Three quarters are pure-blooded French.*** The others are from North or Black Africa. The “hooligans” show up at marches in tiny groups. Their goal: to pass unnoticed. In fact, the experts fear they sneak into the middle of other youths the same age. They are dressed in jeans and basketball shoes. Running at top speed, they know by heart the ins and outs of the streets around the demonstrations, enable them to scatter like sparrows when the CRS are spotted. They could care less about political ideologies. They slip into the marches’ soft underbelly before heading for the front. They then outmaneuver the march stewards to get at the shop fronts. Perfume and make-up boutiques, and clothes stores of all types, shoe and jewelry shops, but also bus shelters and even crêpe vendors have paid a heavy tribute to these demonstrators. A worrying analysis, undertaken at Malignon (French equivalent of the White House - TN) by the central intelligence service, has brought out a new detail: ***more and more high schoolers, with sometimes astounding consequences, are joining actual gangs,*** ones which are established and organized in the housing projects/estates, already identified by special police agencies. Though registered in school at the start of the year, little by little, these youths break free from the institutions. They have quickly left their high schools behind. Haunted by the prospect of unemployment, they are at the very limit of social disenfranchisement. This puts them more and more in solidarity with the already marginalised professional hoodlums. To perfect the policing of the next demonstrations, the intelligence agents are presently taking advantage of the photos taken during and on previous marches and compiled into albums.

“good” students rubbed shoulders with the supposedly “bad” tech school students and academic failures, while college students were, overall, little mobilized (with the exception of Rennes II), despite the violent selection process and competition that happens at the end of the first school year.

High schools are still a place of socialization in a society reorganizing itself around the destruction of previous social relationships (of class, neighborhoods, family, etc.) and they provide an identity connection that can serve as an anchoring point for a movement of revolt or protest. That doesn’t mean there’s an automatic unanimity in every school, just as there is no unanimity between generations on certain problems, but it does mean that high schools can be a point of departure for collective struggles, breaking out of the institutions’ normal functioning, i.e. competition, selection, rivalry, and thus individualism.

The effects of this “school spirit” are not always positive, and the pride it sometimes give rise to often led teenagers to shut themselves into their schools and isolate themselves from others in demos, especially with the creation of march stewards, useless as real protection (from police violence) but effective in separating different groups.

But in practice, the effects seem to have been more positive than negative, at least in Lyon. Organization at the school level counterbalanced the lack of organization at the level of coordination between schools, which never really got going. Organization at the school level allowed people to rely on themselves between two spontaneous demos, and also made it possible for the very young to participate in the movement despite a double pressure from both school and parental authorities.

What happened (and especially what didn’t happen) in Paris is particularly worth examining, in a way we can’t do here. By way of hypothesis, we can however point out that social divisions are less strong today in Paris than in certain cities in the provinces, that schools “of quality” (i.e. bourgeois) are more numerous there, that the networks of power and personal relationships are more diversified and effective there, and thus individualism and “personal initiative” thrive better there.

*The movement resisted the media’s spin tactics, slipping out of its framework.* The spontaneity of actions made it so that the media and the police couldn’t find leaders to work with. They could only bring out again and again the middle class IUT delegates, who had lost all control over the movement as soon as it became dominated by the high schools in the provinces. The “real” leaders, keeping their agitation inside the schools or diffused in the mass of demonstrators, weren’t particularly looking for publicity, and journalists or photographers were reduced to trying to talk to and make an image out of the average youth in the street, often not getting more than a couple of words out of them. The situation approached the ridiculous when, at the “victory/burial” demo of March 31, one TV channel interviewed, for lack of anyone better, an Anarchist Federation militant! One of the movement’s strengths lay in the fact that it never addressed itself to public opinion or to those who manufacture it.

One must also recognize that the level of tension and violence the movement reached in Lyon and Nantes made it neither nice nor responsible, and therefore not very “presentable.” The media could hardly (or hardly wanted to) impose the usual image of respectable young people, both reasonable and concerned, individualistic but generous, twirling the baton in the other sense [in French “baton” means either police club, the

baton majorettes twirl, and “riot”-TN], while focusing on the image of violence and destruction.

The supposed self-absorption of young people toward the mass media thus found no place here, and even, on the contrary, during the course of events, anti-press reactions or at least distrust came out, in the wake of various deals showing the ambiguous ties between police and press (police in Lyon using the logo of the TV channel M6, a Parisian photo agency turning in pictures of “hooligans” to the cops).

*Just as the movement wasn't “captured” in the media's framework, it also didn't submit to the control of political or union organizations.* “Representative” organizations were generally distrusted, considered to be dividing and coopting the movement. It was symptomatic that young people wanted support from adults, but as individuals. In the official demonstrations, high school kids demanded that unionized teachers take off their union buttons if they wanted to join the march.

In Lyon, the student union (UNEF-ID) was tolerated only as far as it provided a logistical framework for actions (cars with loud speakers, printing for leaflets, contacts with media and police). But during the final week, non-unionized students left the coordination and high schoolers, sick of underhanded maneuvers, tried to form their own coordination with certain IUTs. They didn't succeed, but this desire to organize was both more effective and less bureaucratic than the front group organization set up by the UNEF which came in when the struggle in Lyon was out of breath.

The student union did succeed in imposing a cut-off point between the official and unofficial demonstrations, in imposing certain march routes and hasty endings to marches, but it failed in its attempt to prevent the gatherings at Place Bellecour and the demonstration at the Palace of Justice to demand the return of the two youths deported to Algeria.

*Movement and violence.* Beyond the deliberate violent actions, the movement maintained a strategy of tension: there was a desire to occupy territory no matter what the consequences. The police responded in kind, laying siege to Lyon every day around noon (bridges blocked, main arteries cut, metal curtains pulled down over store fronts). This tension, thicker every day, transformed the original pacifism of most demonstrators into a hard, resolute attitude toward the police, without necessarily seeking conflicts.

Little by little, in Lyon and Nantes, the idea emerged that the street offered the only sounding board for the anti-CIP demands and a more general revolt. As opposed to 1986, in Lyon and Nantes, the police became a part of the scenery, since clashes took place right from the first demonstrations and their constant presence was accepted as a given.

The movement being hardly cooptable at a political or media level for the reasons already looked at, the distinction between “hooligans” and “real demonstrators” was taken up as a pseudo-explanation to sew confusion. State and media played on a double confusion: the equation hooligans/suburbs and hooligans/looters. The first equation added to the present political tendency to ghetto-ize the suburbs, the second sought to delegitimize any non-conformist actions or resistance emerging in the street.

More generally, this was an attempt to instill fear according to the tried and true methods of the past (cf. May '68 and the media focus on smashed cars, then the Gaullist triumph in the June elections), but this confirmed also, cynically, the fact that the socially marginalized (defined as being neither high school or college students - in a country

## II.

# Mainstream Media Reports

- and the other, “official” but brought together more by various establishments than by organizations, apparently more calm, but in general, not hostile to the first group.

One of the arguments the police gave to explain the powerlessness of their heavy forces to lead a final “war for order” was that the youth gangs (from the suburbs) knew each other well, were highly mobile, and became impossible to catch because they planted themselves immediately inside the mass of “peaceful” demonstrators. This was an implicit admission that the movement had a much wider significance than the minimum wage protest. Just like two months before with the schools demo: a rather minor problem suddenly polarized politically a general social opposition, threw into the streets tens of thousands of young people who previously had struggled separately in disconnected, scattered ways. A sign in one of the Paris demos summed up well what pushed people to struggle: “We want to live, not survive.” It was not, as we pointed out above for the schools, a specific demand, but something reaching for, while it wasn't expressed that way, a different society. The violence in the suburbs coming downtown to express itself showed that a connection had been made, despite all the circuit-breakers, between movements very different and distinct at the beginning, in a general movement of contestation. The attempts to maintain these divisions between the “hooligans” and the others hardly held out in the face of what became a common fight.

Faced with the expansion and continuation of the movement, the government couldn't maintain its position: by the end of a month it had completely abandoned the lower wage for youth. But that didn't prevent one last day of demonstrations from being even bigger and more violent (just like with the schools demo, the last circuit breaker didn't turn anything off at all). Today, with summer vacation and the lack of any specific goal, the anti-CIP movement is over. It is now a question of when and where it will start up again. Another level of conflict has appeared and its repression can only lead to another generalization (the way the police hesitated to use their full arsenal of repression for fear of a general reaction proves it - which can be defined as the “May '68 syndrome”). On the other hand, the use of circuit-breakers did hardly more than delegitimize the politicians and to demonstrate still more clearly the role of the unions and every organization following “the rules of the game.” Like the government, the institutional or temporary ad hoc mediators have no solution to the practical problems imposed by the evolution of the capitalist system; no adequate response to these unforeseen demonstrations which reveal the level of resistance against this system.

*Echanges et Mouvement*, June 1994

ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT: BP 241, 75886 PARIS CEDEX 18, FRANCE

where everyone is, until at least age 18) have no other recourse but to violence, that therefore this violence must be tracked down and controlled, for example by banning suburban youth from coming into the downtown areas (cf., Pasqua's orders to pick-up so-called hooligans before they got into Paris; and in Lyon the way subway stations were shut to prevent demonstrators from suburban high schools from getting to town,\* and finally, the Lyon police chief banning demos at Place Bellecour).

*Some very uncomfortable teachers.* Apart from a certain response to their unions' slogans (themselves pretty timid and hesitant), the teachers and professors kept the machine running as if the problem had nothing to do with them. There are several possible explanations for this cold attitude. The jobs crisis and steps like the CIP ruin or at least seriously damage the idea of the “student plan,” the idea of the link between good schoolwork and social and professional success. Outside of some critical thinking which remains to be undertaken on this question, they preferred to turn their backs, waiting for things to settle down or for the government to take back its blunder. Nevertheless, many teachers are aware of the crisis brewing in the schools, of the fragile equilibrium dominating that dominates it. More than ever, it's a matter of just holding on in the face of this new type of education consumer. They can't hide the fact that the hooligans are also the kids in their classes. They aren't some outside elements - and while they aren't always identifiable in a quiet period, there is a vague fear that they'll take action either under purely barbaric forms (as in the famous “security problems” in the high school movement of 1990) or in more contestatory and political ways (revolt against the institution or against the power of the administration or even against the teachers themselves). Finally, the majority of teachers, finding the present education system not sufficiently rigorous, couldn't help but have an ambiguous attitude toward a measure which would further devalue the diploma, without offering any educational solution to the problem. They saw the CIP as simply continuing the way the selection process is being shifted from the school to the corporations. The bitterness and disenchantment which results from this surely offers sufficient motivation for a more active participation in the movement. Even if, in practice, the CIP resulted in a devaluation of the role of teachers in the overall education process, some could have thought that this meant a back to basics approach they could profit from in the middle term, since, if it lowered the goal of 80% graduations, it might mean less students in their classes, and thus less work.

While this movement was more favorable to contact with adults than in 1986, teachers pretty much remained spectators. What a contrast to their participation in the legendary demonstration (supported by the pupils in fact!) against the Falloux Bill, hardly two months earlier [discussed in the article “Circuit-breakers Broken”].

A massive mobilization for a symbol rather than a mobilization against a step in the general reorganization of work! There's plenty of material there to deepen the understanding of ideology's resistance in the era of the end of ideologies!

In fact, the only adults who took part (not counting the union goons and other march steward specialists) were the parents of the teenagers affected. For them as for their kids, the CIP sounded the death knell on the myth of social climbing.

That says a lot, not about the consciousness of others who could reasonably believe that this measure would not ricochet onto them as well, and wouldn't herald, via the Five Year Employment Law, a new restructuring of work, but on the apathy and

submissiveness in the face of what is considered as inevitable: the “diktat” of the economy and “progress.”

*Critical elements.* Journalists and sociologists have often contrasted this movement with that of '68 as being one of integration and not of revolt. That seems too easy, and might mean two things:

First of all, the movement in '68 was a protest movement instigated by middle class youth. It also represented a response to a quick integration of more poor youth into the schools without the necessary stages of adjustment also being set up. While the students at that time still had plenty of opportunities to find work and even to choose it, it didn't stay that way, since already in that period, there was fierce competition in certain departments (Law, Science, Economics, Medicine). In this regard, the Faure Reform after May '68 (which restructured the school system, creating various types of diplomas, and vocational schools) represented a provisional solution now called into question by the end of the period of growth.

Further, the violence of the anti-CIP reaction cannot be understood if seen as a purely defensive struggle. As already in 1986, the goal, while limited, allows the protest movement to center and clarify itself, without necessarily hiding a social background. When the government makes the slightest blunder, the entire system appears absurd. What is normally accepted or submitted to individually is then refused collectively. The State as such wasn't denounced more than in 1986 - one still addressed oneself to the government, and, in both cases, it must be remembered that it was right-wing, which makes less comprehensible the struggle and movement's relation to the State and the ruling class. Nevertheless, the ruling powers' intransigent attitude helped to clarify the movement's political perception. It is no longer focused on the traditional left-right opposition, but on the relation between power and justice. The police interventions, measures by the prefectures, and the Pasqua laws clearly demonstrate the fragility of civil rights, and the reality of the State in a society pressed against the wall.

It also seems that the link with the 1968 libertarian revolt has been renewed. The subject is no longer taboo; you sense a renewed interest for a period which until a little while ago had been completely obscured and misrepresented. (The return of certain slogans, like “May '68 isn't finished” bear witness to this evolution).

The 1986 movement can be roughly defined as a movement for equality which came out of an ideological environment that can be summed up in three words: human rights, democracy, consensus; and in an economic climate seeming to indicate recovery. The movement was thus both naive and optimistic: it demanded an abstract equality, an equality in principle, while in reality, the diversification of training and educational levels was already creating inequalities without the phenomena of marginalization being openly perceived.

The withdrawal of the Devaquet Bill seemed like a satisfactory solution and appeared to be a great victory. The 1986 movement was therefore very surprised by the police repression at the end of the national demo in Paris and the death of Malik Oussékine was considered more as an unfortunate blunder on Pasqua's part than a reaction from the State.

The 1994 movement was against the destruction of social relationships and against discrimination, whether on a social basis, or of age, nationality or race. It was also more about solidarity than equality.

which expressed something other than the wage problem. The government was able to believe that these demonstrations would do nothing but “mark the date” and rapidly die out: in Autumn 1993 there were a few rather sporadic student demos, with the exception of a more important struggle in Nantes over the issue of grants for student housing. This local movement's vigor, and the fear that it would spread had already forced the government to retreat. The attempts of student union organizations to spread this movement both to control it and to set themselves up as mediators, had completely failed.

It wasn't the same in February-March 1994. A category of high school and college students were solidly affected by the measures on the youth minimum wage, called CIP (control d'insertion professionnelle - beginning work contract) and immediately rebaptised “SMIC-jeunes” (minimum wage for youth). Once again placed in this situation, difficult for all governments, of having to choose between giving in and losing face, or betting on the decline of the movement, the French state chose the second solution. It could also count on the student and workers' unions to co-opt and channel any sign of extension, but after several weeks, it became clear that all these hopes had completely underestimated the dynamics of a movement in 1994 France and its capacity to integrate all the dispersed and localized currents of resistance to the capitalist system.

Not only were the demonstrations repeated, each time gathering more and more participants, but they also spread widely throughout the country, even in small cities where the concentration of schools brings together each day several thousand high school and college-aged youth (the latter being that much more motivated since they pursue job training studies in greater numbers and because the impact of the crisis is a lot more strongly and directly felt in these small cities - where one or several local companies dominate, companies whose closing or downsizing had a much bigger impact than in the major cities).

*Totally out of control.* Since the college and high school student unions are particularly weak, the movement slipped out of virtually all control. Since a part of these young people living in the suburban ghettos, under particular conditions, are especially affected by unemployment and have the experience of daily conflicts with the police, the development of the struggle gave them an opportunity, not so much to struggle for “their future and a decent wage,” but to come out of their ghetto and affirm their social fight with its specific methods on a more vast and more general battlefield.

So, a bridge was built and all the foreseen fuses had been blown while the movement blew up into a national protest - always with the new quality that it was often relatively bigger and more violent outside the capital (in Lyon and Nantes for example). In Paris, a new phenomena was observed, which demonstrates very well the fact that the organisation circuit-breaker didn't go off at all. The demonstrations were divided into two equal parts:

- one without any banners and slogans, more radical in its violent methods (not at all wary of confrontations) moving spontaneously to the head of the march, in front of the “organizers” marching behind their signs shouting moronic slogans through their megaphones.

The January 16th demo was “organized” by a wide spectrum of unions and parties. Normally, such appeals find a faint response, not a gathering of throngs. Two facts should be pointed out: on the one hand, the official organizers had to almost hide their presence (some were even booed), and some placards proclaimed explicitly “I march for the schools, not for the politicians.” On the other hand, the demo's enormous success, unforeseen by anyone, obliged the government and the organizations both to start talking about, not only the problems of the schools, but of unemployment, health, retirement, etc.

*The unification of the discontent.* These discussions proceed from the attempt which is always present in the capitalist system to channel all social movement into the existing structures or to create new ones to fill that function.

The strike at Air France developed - for everyone to see - the (hidden) tendencies of “small” strikes, and recalled, in its suddenness and methods of struggle, the truck drivers' strike of 1992. But the movement was able to be more or less contained (notably with the preexistence of the interunion coordination), as well as the possibility of hitting several circuit-breakers - the CEO's resignation, the temporary cancellation of the lay-off plan, the organization of a “day of action” (which, usually, under the cover of “extension,” marks the final point of a conflict).

From this point of view, the “large” demonstration for the schools carried this same ambiguity: the spontaneous expression of being fed-up as a detour from a secondary problem, with the construction of a sort of national unity to complement the institutional breakdown.

In February 1994, the fishermen's strike, as much as it stayed strictly inside the profession, in its “excesses” it went outside the control of the organisations, and in its violence it joined other dispersed conflicts, and once more forcing the government into a difficult retreat.

The January 16th demonstration expressed - timidly - the unification or a discontentment until then spread out in different social categories. This tendency did not escape the notice of the union organizations, who, in February and March 1994 tried to set up some ways to let off steam to prevent a too-powerful united movement: the “days of action,” the alternating “national” demonstrations: either in a state company (Telecom or Railroads), a specific industry (miners), or interprofessional. These movements weren't able to stop some local strikes, more or less wildcat: the last virtually total strike in all Parisian transportation was so well followed, even called by all the unions, that it no longer appeared as a last resort but as the affirmation of a combativity.

In an unexpected way, the tendency thrown into relief in the January 16th demonstration, which every organization of social control would try to master, was to surge forth where they hardly expected it, in a series of movements, much less controlled than the previous ones and forging links, connections between struggles previously separated not only geographically, but also in the implication of distinct social groups.

*Beyond the youth wage and particularisms.* The government's plan to lower youth unemployment (which stands around 25%) by authorizing employers to hire them (even with a university degree) at 80% of the minimum wage was not supposed to give rise to major protests, seeing as how the preceding social-democratic government had taken similar actions a few years ago. But, just like what happened in January with the schools problem, this provoked the irruption of a totally unforeseen resistance among youths

The unemployed (many students have unemployed parents) and the homeless weren't seen as outsiders, but as victims of a system that grinds down the weakest or most unfortunate.

School drop-outs were not very far off. The image of a society for “winners” that took a beating. The immediate solidarity with the two deportees from Lyon to Algeria was the sign of a revolt and a will to fight, when possible, a system which constantly divides people in order to maintain its domination over all. The value of solidarity has beaten back, even if momentarily, the dominant individualistic values.

On the other hand, more and more people know that equality is a decoy, or that it only exists in a deformed caricature of equality at the bottom (all youth are affected by the CIP as all adults are potentially by unemployment). Democracy itself, without being clearly criticized - despite slogans in the style of “Dictatorship means keep your mouth shut; democracy means never shut up” - loses its positive connotations, empty of any meaningful content. Demonstrators perceived this concretely when they wondered if they really had the right to demonstrate, and where, when, etc. There was suddenly a judicial void... which was filled when the old anti-hooligan law was integrated into the new penal code. The demonstrators tried to stand up to the fact that riotous assembly was a crime. Whether you were for or against violence, whether you tolerated the “hooligans” or not was less important than keeping the pressure on. If there was ever a time when this has been possible, it's 1994. Society is already post-consensual; the image, from the '70s and '80s, of the “terrorist” as the sole desperate violence against the state, is fading. The violence of the farmers, the miners, or the fishermen is replacing it, in a more concrete way which is thus more understandable. This violence is a violence of social breakdown expressing that the “consensus” doesn't take everyone into account. It is then seized on, often confusedly, as a break from the artificial consensus in favor of the dominant interests, and as such, is not *a priori* illegitimate, being an involuntary result of a social tension which itself is at stake in the struggle: “this is the only thing 'they' understand, and this is what makes them back down.” If this awareness is possible, it is also because it was the consciousness of a minority. The call to mobilization and for the demonstrations got a big response in every city, even small ones, but the movement was more dispersed than concentrated. Paris didn't follow, the number of demonstrators didn't grow, college students hardly budged, and many participants among the most active didn't realize that their strength was not in their numbers but in their determination. It was a mass vanguard, if you will, who held the streets. It was supported by a base of high school kids, but the latter didn't keep up the pace of the ones who wanted to impose a constant pressure. This lag, accentuated by the fear of the police and the repression in all its forms (some reprisals were taken in the schools), caused the movement's decline during the final week in Lyon.

The gradual fixation of many high schoolers on the question of march stewards was another sign of this lag which developed between the most combative who remained focused on their fixed goal, and some among the most active who lost their lucidity and energy in organizing every morning what inevitably failed in the afternoon. But all that wasn't unambiguous, and you could sometimes observe a double situation with on the one hand the attempt to set up march stewards school by school (with no real function, only as symbols, identity, self-supervision) to catch up with the official demonstrations,

and on the other hand, the total absence of basic precautions against the police in the spontaneous demos.

It is remarkable that the idea of a committee of stewards against the first line of police was never once put forward. You could even say that the idea of march stewards was the only real manipulation the movement gave in to. They (the media, the unions, establishment heads, etc.) imposed it from the outside as a line of demarcation in relation to the “hooligans,” and it was accepted by the majority.

While 1986 was the first entirely student movement (which wasn't the case in 1968), it was still a period where one could believe that the democratization of education and of society more generally was not over and that it was enough to guard against blockages and dysfunctions. Particular to the students of that period, it wasn't that they were privileged, but that they were the object of a particular reproduction, outside the world of work, which gave rise to their distrust of the world of adults and their virulent “youthism.”

It's this temporary outsider-ness which appeared as a privilege: neither working nor unemployed. The crisis of the labor market and or work itself was not yet such that certain well-determined social groups can be isolated from the world of work.

Today, that is no longer the case. The crisis has spread to all social sectors, the borderline between work and non-work being more and more blurred (the development of job-training, temporary work, generalized casualisation, including inside the schools with the CIP).\*\*\*

In 1994, the social contradictions are such that being outside is hardly possible. So it's not surprising that the unemployed and the homeless could speak in the joyful and easily manipulable muddle of the Lyon coordination's general assemblies. Its new, and it's not much, but the historic connection with 1968 and the Sorbonne open to all has been renewed, if only in a symbolic way.

Further, the success of the slogan, “Dad, I found a job - yours” made a bridge between generations rooted in reality and an awareness of the general attack against the old bases of the work system - fordism and the welfare state of the “Glorious Thirties.” Things were thus not limited to the specificity “youth,” even if repeated references (sometimes corresponding to objective situations) are made to it (drugs, AIDS. “hard times” specific to one generation, etc).

Without consciously putting itself on a political level or at the level of the struggle against the State (no anti-State slogans, only slogans against particular politicians), the movement had a different and more advanced vision than that of 1986. While Devaquet was seen as a bad pupil who one had to ask to redo his homework, Balladur was directly insulted, which both renewed the metaphoric language of the “declassés” of 1968 and in the unfrilled language of the suburbs. “Balladur=scumbag” (rhymes in French-TN] is perhaps not very theoretical, but after all, “CRS=SS” (slogan from 68) wasn't either and yet certain ideas followed it.

However, as in 1986 and contrary to '68, the movement was concretely focused on a single issue which took on the value of a pretext. While this gave it a great strength in the unity of its demand, it took away any second wind once the measure was withdrawn. The revolt which largely outmaneuvered the government plan came up against the absence of any utopian project in the movement.\*\*\*\*

We are all there...

## Circuit-Breakers Broken

*This article discusses some of the social turmoil in France leading up to the riotous protest wave in March, placing it in context.*

*It was a social - not political - demonstration.* January 16, 1994, on a cold and rainy Sunday, between 600,000 and a million people from all over France came to demonstrate. They demanded, apparently peacefully, but outside of bourgeois democratic legality, the annulment of a law authorizing the regional and city authorities to fund private schools -almost all of them Catholic. This law had been quietly voted-in by the ultra-conservative parliament: its authors and the government hoped it would hardly stir a ripple, since the preceding social-democrat (Socialist Party) government had already largely opened the door in this direction, without much opposition. The law was hastily declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Council two days before the demonstration. They hoped this would disarm the rising opposition, but it had no effect on these people who had decided to take to the streets to express their hostility to a policy and at the same time their contempt for all politicians.

*Something other than the education issue.* According to polls, more than 40% of the demonstrators were essentially either teachers or very close to the public school system. But all the rest were a mix of people from both the cities and the country, the young and old, students, blue and white collar workers, retired and active, men and women. In demonstrating, they wanted to express something other than a position on the education issue: they were fed up with a whole bunch of recent legislative and governmental measures affecting a wide range of current problems in French society, but also, vaguely, fed up with the society.

The French electoral system links to parliament and the government a “majority” which represents barely 30% of “adult citizens,” and a lot less if one includes adolescents and the millions of immigrants without the right to vote. The result of this situation is, on the one hand, a growing gap between the government, relying on a large parliamentary majority, who think - often in terms of revenge - that they can get away with reactionary measures, and the class of workers submitting to the full brunt of the economic crisis. And on the other hand, there is a rejection of any sort of political mediation, the conservative government continuing on this point the preceding social-democratic one in the impossibility - ripening into incapacity - to respond to the social and economic problems. Beyond these attitudes toward “politics,” most workers feel anxiety about the uncertainties of the economic situation and their future: there is no hope for “another society,” but there is a strong feeling that this society and everything it rests on has nothing more to offer.

The importance of this demonstration has to be placed in the context of the overall French social situation. We have already pointed out the rise, in the last few years, of a social “malaise,” accompanied by a “disaffection with the traditional structures of organization and forms of action they offer.” We have also evoked “the rise in the level of violence in workers' struggles” and “the transformation of attitudes in everyday work life and everyday “social” life, the persistence and development of forms of collective resistance where violence will be more and more present.”

discredited, rather than thinking about the objective possibilities of superseding the present historical conditions... The festivities were thus suppressed after the 5th day of general assembly, and the occupation found itself relegated to some prefab buildings. The slogan remained 'This is only the beginning' ...we would see about that!

The assembly discussions went on. Apart from the interminably dry debates over details, a few wider ideas went beyond simple hostility toward the CIP: denouncing the repression (probably the most useful effort, especially when 500 nervous people went down to demonstrate in front of the police station when 4 friends were arrested), the call for Pasqua's and Balladur's resignation, meetings with workers and unemployed people (under the tutelage of "Action for Jobs," the union "Workers' Strength," and even some sociologists), demands for the right to wage-slavery, a decent wage for all, a global redistribution of the wealth... At no time in these common discussions was the state ever envisioned except through Balladur and Pasqua [the Prime and Interior Ministers-TN], the rationality of money didn't seem to arouse any visible indignation, and neither the university itself nor the role of students were called into question. The vague feeling of being able to break free of everyday life was quickly swept away by the seriousness of public debate in which they felt they had to respond seriously. Connections with other youths symbolized by the group fraternization with a brave young guy who had risked 6 months in jail for having participated in the demos, were rather shy and distant.

Over all, with the best information in the world at their fingertips, the students made an "autonomous" apprenticeship in ideology. Playing who could be the most militant, they formed a "protest" movement to the left of the UNEP, the main student union. In this regard, the confusionism of the anarchists revealed the contradictions of wanting to hold on to a part of the movement and avoid any uncontrollable spill-over. In Rennes, the anarchists (of SCALP or Libertarian Alternative) weren't up to the level of the Parisian "anarcho-situationists" described in the magazine *Actuel* (May '94), though if this is what's taking the Leninists' place, bravo! The demos stuck to the good student image, and where some went so far as to disguise themselves as urban guerrillas, every effort was made to restrain people from getting too excited. The role of the march stewards (high-schoolers particularly) was totally exasperating, preventing anything from happening apart from, at best, egg throwing and graffiti. It seemed that, with every charge, the CRS were the only ones whose fury was getting aroused. It should be said, however, that ever since the February 4th fishermen's demo they'd really had their fangs out.

Yet there were a few malcontents, frustrated at not having the fun they were supposed to have at a demo, who shared cynical comments on the sidelines and attempted to rough things up a bit.

But the general consensus that, no matter what, everything must happen peacefully, the desire to stay respectable and democratic (no violence, no power-struggle with the administration, no commando-looting, for example...), the idea that "the situation wasn't ripe" (according to one SCALP member), put the movement in its grave, and gave the impression in hindsight that it was relatively useless. *Veni, vidi, non vici!*

[unsigned]

*Some general remarks on the evolution of relations between society and government.*

The anti-CIP movement has brought out a certain number of new elements in the government/society relationship and in the behavior of the State. It has notably demonstrated aspects at once consensual and post-consensual of the present situation. Consensual because the demand concerned a specific measure and that the legitimacy of the political system was never really questioned, Once more there was an absence of the idea of a radical alternative. But, at the same time, and in contrast to the 1986 movement which stayed within the limits of the left-right debate and the political debate on the solutions to the crisis, consensus was superseded in an affirmation of the powerlessness of politicians, who appeared all cut from the same cloth. Even in one area - employment - which does distil the essential elements of social life, everyone seemed to think that the various politicians grip on the events was very weak.

In the framework of this accepting/refusing of the democratic rules, the only possible action is an action in the margins, initiated from a minoritarian point of view on specific points. No, the State was not openly criticized, since there existed no alternative, but it has become legitimate to oppose it, even violently, on the condition that the violence is defensive. The modes of action themselves demonstrate a clear novelty: the reoccupation of downtown areas normally devoted to the car and the commodity with a protest no longer limiting itself to the rules of the democratic game.\*\*\*

People have become aware of the government's impotence, which has been openly demonstrated in the CIP affair. Political decisions have a highly artificial air. They no longer seem to be taken as a result of reflection, analysis or long-term planning, but out of the simple necessity - which is becoming absolute - to "do something." This "something" has limited room to maneuver. Limited by the consensual obligation to reaffirm the existence of economic laws, but limited also by the fact that even the ruling powers no longer believe that it is possible, within the framework of these laws, to solve the employment problem. Thus, everyone knows (including the corporations) that lowering wages will not create jobs, but since the laws of the market are ideological dogmas, everyone strives to believe it. Conversely, the highly ideological quality of these measures enables the government to withdraw them at the slightest opposition without giving the impression of changing their minds.

The fact that the State respects intrinsic laws which are powerless to satisfy the needs of social reproduction condemns it to a loss of authority over society. So state action rarefies itself in ideology (the defense of secularism, the myth of the market, etc.). This explains the series of proposals put forward and then retracted for the last ten years. The ruling powers largely dominate society, since nothing seems capable of resisting it, but it reveals itself incapable of guiding society, of reforming it, or even of controlling all its aspects. Society seems to respond to the artificiality of authority by taking on a certain autonomy. Through their actions, the young have marked off their territory, drawn up the limits beyond which the rulers henceforth cannot only cross with caution.

With the anti-CIP movement, one of the limits of consensus was reached: too much unanimity is harmful to the powerful, for it makes dialogue impossible. A generally calm and temperate political climate can give way, at any moment, to local but violent storms that the State can only contain with police repression and political retreat.

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- \* 700 students from Charlie Chaplin High, coming down on foot from Décines had to block a big highway to get authorities to reopen the subway. This event says a lot about the relationship between the police and public transport.
- \*\* Of course, there was hardly any critique of work in itself, but the crisis of work, the ideology of “value without labor” brought the movement to the edge of this critique. The same way that workers or managers say before being laid-off (made redundant), “What good is it to put so much into a company?,” high schoolers call into question the usefulness of doing schoolwork if they end up with the CIP or worse still.
- \*\*\* [for this page there are two notes in the text but only one footnote text - CAC] Discussions on the Five Year Law which continue today in certain universities (Rennes II), and high schools are the sign that nothing has been settled and that there is no belief in any real victory. But this shouldn't give us any illusions. If a muted tension still exists and only asks to show itself, the professionals of politics and of protest are already trying to retake the field.
- \*\*\*\* [this note is for the last page beginning “People have become aware... ,” however there is no footnote in the text of our edition] Political debate is disappearing the same way. Politics' are perceived as a business of special groups and of the confrontation or certain principles (i.e. secularism/right to religion) but not a meaningful confrontation Politics is so meaningless that citizens almost systematically re-elect politicians whose corruption has been clearly revealed by “scandals.” All politics being generally discredited, it affects no one.

## Rennes Students - Lame

An atmosphere of complete submission had reigned at Rennes University for more than five years, offset only by Thursday night drinking binges. The depoliticisation of university life has not only baffled the professors, who no longer recognize who they're leaching, but especially leftist and far-left militants. Only the royalists and the Breton nationalists could still claim a decent group on campus. But apparently the anarchists of SCALP had also done all right recruiting around their perennial slogans, and would soon be seen in action.

The anti-CIP movement took a while to get off the ground. Its early agitators' amateurism badly concealed their need for militants who knew how to organize a mobilization. It finally took the intervention of two students from Nantes to inject some life into the Rennes students. The same day in Nantes the more exemplary protagonists were joyously emptying the classrooms of furniture to block any return to classes. That night in Rennes, there were more than 1,000 people, at the general assembly. The discussions were astonishingly safe. They expressed solidarity with the arrested demonstrators of the previous week in Paris, Lyon, Nantes, and Rennes; they denounced Pasqua, the CRS, limited their concerns to the CIP and even attempted some shallow social criticism. Then they elected their committees (anti-repression, security, ideas, logistics, and media committees, etc) on the basis of revocability. After that, a festive, party atmosphere set in spontaneously, hardly more than a little get-together, since it was in the hall and people seemed to make a vague attempt at communication.

In fact, the (predictable) limits of the movement's direct democracy, actions and ideology were more and more noticeable, especially in contrast to the agitation nationally.

The next day, a meeting between the president, his police, and the strike committee cleared things up as to how truly angry the strike's representatives were. The President gently informed them of their responsibilities toward security risks, and of the respect due for “their” buildings, “their work tools.” He insinuated that, if they wanted to be taken seriously, the students should become potential snitches and grasses to avoid any return to the previous night's debauchery (stolen equipment, inappropriate graffiti on new buildings: “How beautiful a burning school would be”). The students thanked him for his advice, and for letting them use a telephone and a photocopier in addition to the building they had already “reappropriated.”

Already, small minded people were murmuring that .the building wasn't really occupied, that you couldn't say you were in solidarity with the “hooligans,” and were likewise paranoid about the least bit of damage to the building, the smallest bonfire, saying that this was all just for a laugh...

The student militants, who thought of themselves as libertarians, towards the end of the 4th night, began to show their fatigue at having to stay awake so late and get up so early to clean, so as not to make too much work for the cleaning ladies (who said they didn't care and found the whole thing rather amusing). What's more, the person in charge of logistics complained to the schools' eminent 'managers about the profusion of drunkards in such a clean, tidy, spotless establishment.

The low grumbling of the administration and of the non-striking majority (becoming less silent) led the responsible strikers to worry about the movement being



## “We Live on a Little Cloud...”

### Young Anarchists in Paris

*Excerpts from a conversation on the “Your life story” show on Radio Libertaire (Anarchist Federation radio Station in Paris), April 9, 1994.*

*Q: In a mass conflict like this one, what does it mean to be a libertarian (European meaning: anarchist/communist spectrum-TN)?*

**FRÉDÉRIC** (Paris School of Architecture): During the school occupation, we organized many discussions. There was also the problem of student delegations. We defended the idea that the student representatives should have mandates predetermined by the assembly and be instantly recallable. These propositions were widely accepted. In other places, the delegates didn't have a choice, which shows you what kind of atmosphere dominated the movement.

**VINCENT** (Maurice Ravel high school): I go to school in the north of Paris. There's a big difference these days between the high schools in Paris and the ones in the suburbs. The Parisian high schools are bourgeois and petits-bourgeois. Well before the movement I believed in revolutionary ideas, anarchist or communist. I tried to get the kids around me to do things, but without success. When the CIP came along, we had discussions. I called for a strike and demonstrations. And I was surprised to see people go on strike twice and participate in demos. I was really astonished, since before the movement there had been a consensus of general conformism.

*Q: How would you explain this sudden shift from apathy to engagement?*

**VINCENT**: I think the outside events made it happen. Most young people only think about finding their place in society as it is. But the crisis atmosphere and the increase in unemployment are realities that weigh more and more on people's minds. School or no school; you're going to wind up unemployed!

**FABIEN** (Tolbiac college, Paris): In any school, nothing much happened before the movement. We militants always met amongst ourselves...

*Q: You yourselves are products of a selection. Has this question been raised in the movement? On the fact that you are in some sort of “privileged” position as opposed to those who've been “rejected”? (Referring to the university selection process. -TN)*

**FABIEN**: The politicians raised this issue, of course. But the others, not really. But during the movement there was a certain awakening on this subject.

**LORENZO** (self-managed, alternative high school, Paris): In our high school, which is really on the margins of the official school system, just a month ago everything was routine. The kids there are very rebellious against traditional education, but you couldn't say they're militants 100%. Sure, they're better informed: there are posters

when violence was more linked to political groups, the “autonomes” for example. They don't understand today's riots. It's beyond them.

**FRÉDÉRIC**: Among the rioters, there are just as many high school kids, college students, young workers, and unemployed. You can't emphasize it enough: young people in the suburbs no longer have any identity. In their violent actions, they take on an identity, people talk about them. Because they want people to talk about them! Socially, it proves they exist.

**VINCENT**: I see the people that break windows and I understand them perfectly. Maybe even I would be ready to follow them. On the other hand, I see the people who have their windows broken and I understand them ...a little. But you can't forget the violence on the other side, the cops' violence.

**LORENZO**: A movement, you have to see how it is born and how it ends. Of course, there are movements started by the unions that finish when they decide... or almost! It's an old story: Thorez once said, “You have to know how to end a strike.” Now, to get back to the present, I think the unions are afraid of occupations they prefer street demonstrations. What's new is that the organizations have also lost control of the demos. As libertarians, we're as much against the State's actions as we are against the unions' authoritarian practices. The street violence is irrational, not something you could or could not try to control. If there were more school or workplace occupations, attempts at self-management, there wouldn't be any there.

**FREDERIC**: We're all against street violence. But are there any other ways to make ourselves heard? I have yet to hear of any. I still prefer this violence to the reformism of the unions who whore themselves to the government. The fact is, in the present situation the daily choice seems to be between following the bureaucratic organizations and electoralism. If that's what we're being offered, thanks a lot! Right now we have to fight for the imprisoned comrades who have trials coming up. We have to fight for amnesty and organize against the repression. At Tolbiac College, we've created solidarity committees. But it's fading. There aren't a lot of people. I think in the provinces, in Lyon, Rennes, and Nantes, the mobilization is stronger. Paris remains a bourgeois city, we live on a little cloud...

all over the place. We didn't help start the movement, but from the minute it existed we found it easier to join than the other high schools. In ours there's a really strong individualist spirit. For the most part, that's great! For example, from our point of view, it was weird to see these high schools marching behind their banners with their "school spirit." We don't feel part of any structure - we're individuals. But still, the self-managed high school has played a role in this movement. Very quickly, we started handing out leaflets in nearby schools. All of a sudden, a vocational high school - they learn masonry - came to contact us. That was when we got heavily involved in things. We started working with the student coordinations, and we could see what was happening - the student unions' intrigues and machinations. We tried to fight for direct democracy in the coordinations. How were they formed? The high school coordinations, anyway, had a structure created by the student unions. They were the only ones who had enough activist and contacts to get a message out. We waited for them to do it, and then we came. At the beginning, the student Coordination - which was totally under the unions' control - tried to inject its political line into the assemblies. Everything was in an incredible mess. We hadn't even elected delegates and nobody had any experience with direct democracy. You had to see how these meetings went! If a union rigged things right, it could easily get the assembly to agree to what it wanted. We began to denounce these ploys. In the south side of Paris we ended up creating a federation of high schools. For whatever that was worth! It did enable us to get the most militant people together: we met and talked things over. In the North, another federation was formed by the Trotsky Youth. Just before the government withdrew the plan, the student unions had been outflanked on the left and had quit the coordination. That was a very significant moment. Especially because this takeover was not done by far-left militants, but by the high school rank-and-file. No luck: the CIP crawled back into its hole and the high school kids were only high school kids again! The government caved in too early! Everything was over!

*Q: You get the impression that without the presence of the leftist organizations, you would've had trouble organizing yourselves. Everything happened in the pre-established leadership of the organizations. Was that true in the colleges too?*

**FRÉDÉRIC:** In the Parisian universities, it's true that the anarchists and the leftists (I differentiate the two) played an important role. In the beginning, even the young Socialists (youth group of one of the governing parties-TN) had been active. They were quickly overwhelmed by the movement. You could say that, at Tolbiac in any case, the agitation in the beginning was a purely leftist creation. Then everything got more complicated. At one point, the president of one of the student unions was received by Balladur when his own membership didn't even know about it. That caused a real scandal in the general assemblies. Their own activists had become really critical of the leadership. Some of them became radicalized. (...)

**VINCENT:** For me, this movement was also a party. For two weeks, I didn't set foot in school. There was a liberating wind in my life. Did it go any deeper? Of course, for me, this thing was going further than the CIP. It was against all forms of authority. For a lot of people in my high school, though, the only objective was to protest the

CIP. But for some, it really meant becoming aware of the social and economic system they live in.

**FABRICE:** I'm more conservative. I don't think the movement went deep enough. At least in Paris. The students moved 'cause someone was messing with their future income. But when we tried to go beyond that, for example, against Pasqua's anti-immigration laws, they weren't into it. (...)

**FRÉDÉRIC:** Until now, it appeared to me that students had rejected politics. All of a sudden, the word politics was no longer a "big word." They ...[word missing from original text]... politics, and what they did was political.

**LORENZO:** We're living through the contradiction of the period. They created all these new technical training schools and all that crap after the '86 movement. Today, the reality has caught up with us: there aren't any more jobs. Right away, something clicks! Radical ideas go over really well! It pretty good for us. In the high schools, the slogan, "Immigrants, French, same bosses, same right!" was very well taken.

*Q: The demonstrations?*

**FRÉDÉRIC:** There, too, we found ourselves dependent on the unions. They were the ones who decided the dates and the routes. We just tailgated. We went out marching, from the schools to the meeting points. After that, in the demos, it was another story. Things were different.

**VINCENT:** On one side was the unions' rhetoric: "Watch out, nice students, there are hooligans among you!" On the other side, many students only reacted to the police repression. Our slogan was: "*Nous sommes tous des casseurs!*" ("We are all hooligans")

**FRÉDÉRIC:** In the general assemblies, we always voted for solidarity with the so-called "*casseurs.*" But I also heard a delegate from the IUT coordination call for a security force (monitors) to collaborate with the police to expel the "hooligans" from the demos! Her proposal didn't pass. It would keep us all out of the demos! It's true there were problems organizing demo monitors. They didn't know very well what to do or how to do it. Finally it was done by the unions, and in the demos it ended up being completely overwhelmed.

**LORENZO:** It's important to recognize that, if the talk was radicalized, the attitude in the streets was just as radicalized. Today, the only monitors capable of keeping a demo in line are the CGT! And still, there are lots of fights with them! It's true, they have a lot of experience policing demos. The student unions were totally wiped-out in the assemblies and the demos! Sometimes you almost felt sorry for them!

**FABIEN:** In the general assemblies, the union activists could only intervene as individuals. When they tried to speak in the name of an organization, they weren't listened to.

**LORENZO:** There have always been hooligans. History is full of beautiful examples: 1789, the Paris Commune, May '68. It's not only today that there are police provocateurs! What can you think? It's a false debate concocted by the people that create public opinion. A lot of people talking like that have lived through 1968-70,