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# Self-management and Revolutionary Crisis in France

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PUBLISHED BY THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST  
TENDENCY OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

# The Revolutionary Crisis in France

What has just occurred in France will long be the subject for discussion, particularly as regards the many lessons to be drawn from the new situation created in this advanced capitalist country.

The situation in France rapidly developed in a period of a few days from a pre-revolutionary to a frankly revolutionary situation.

A simple protest movement against police violence, begun by a few students, quickly became a vast "confrontation" with "neo-capitalist" society and a general strike of ten million workers.

Both the nature of the problems posed and the extent of the movement merited it being classed, as we stated from the very first days, as the most important social movement in France since the Paris Commune.

This revolutionary movement is of major European and world-wide importance because it occurred in an advanced capitalist country which was not passing through a sharp economic crisis, but was

rather in a period of relative "prosperity" which was incomparable with the grim condition **or** the under-developed countries of the crisis-ridden capitalist countries of pre-World War II.

This crisis confirms that a revolutionary crisis is still possible in the advanced capitalist countries without there necessarily being a major economic crisis. Such a revolutionary crisis poses questions not only about the material standard of living but about the type of life in the "consumer" and "abundant" society.

Problems arising from the political and cultural superstructure of this society may unleash and feed such a revolutionary crisis - something very different to the situation we were familiar with in Europe before World War II.

In this connection, just compare for example Leon Trotsky's analysis of the situation in France in 1935-6 and the reasons for the present situation and the way it has developed.

The Platform of the Revolutionary Marxist tendency emphasises that ...

"... the degree of satisfaction the proletariat derives from its wages is historically conditioned by the increased needs arising from the new type of life which is constantly changing ..."

The Platform continues ...

" It is necessary to understand the position of the new generation of the proletariat which has grown up in the advanced capitalist countries to feel and appreciate its new needs and expectations. The evolution of the advanced capitalist countries of Europe and the United States results in increased material and social needs among the workers; needs which are still far from being satisfied by salaries or social benefits or social services in general.

" ... starting therefore from the global situation of the workers in the advanced capitalist countries and the new needs created by the development of capitalism in these countries and the new objective possibilities, it will be possible and necessary to begin a struggle for power and socialism."

The French events have fully confirmed this analysis and perspective. The role of "detonator" was played by the students' "contestation" movement and the revolutionary act of their actual abolition of capitalist State control over their schools through student democratic management of them in association with their teachers.

In the crisis the question of a major economic crisis was only in the background as a possibility for the future and a result of the revolutionary crisis. The students' challenge was a reaction against the persistent and accumulated oppression of the spirit and aspirations of the young, against the phenomenon of aggravated alienation which the "consumer" society engenders.

### THE BACKGROUND AND CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

The crisis resulted from the interaction of external and internal factors. The pioneers of the French students' revolutionary movement are the American students demanding "student power" in their universities, the "provos" in Holland and Scandinavia, and the revolutionary students of Japan, Germany, Italy and Spain.

The student youth aroused by the facts of the Colonial Revolution, especially by the titanic resistance of the Vietnamese people, the ideological advance of the Cuban Revolution, the revolutionary practice and heroic death of Che Guevara and the revolt of the American blacks, has become considerably politicised and combative over the past years. The student youth has emerged as a genuine political vanguard in the struggle either against imperialism or - in the workers' states - against bureaucracy.

In such a situation it has also begun to become aware of the increased alienation of the producer and citizen in the "neo-capitalist" "consumer" society obeying the law of maximalisation of profits for monopolist enterprises and the subjection of the state to the monopoly capitalist sector.

If the "daily bread" is assured in such a society, producers and citizens nevertheless have practically no chance of participating in decision-making in any field -- economic, cultural or political. Everyone must blindly obey the demands of the monopoly economy and orders from the super-centralist and authoritarian State.

But this is in flagrant and explosive contradiction with the higher cultural level of the masses and the objective need for increased democratisation of social life if economic and political sclerosis is to be avoided. The roots of the present revolutionary movement which now grips the mass of French students lie precisely in the dynamic interaction of these conjunctural external factors with those which are internal and structural.

What is special in the French situation is not the simple fact that the students have challenged "neo-capitalist" society, as students have done elsewhere. What is special is the extent to which this movement has, to all intents and purposes, abolished capitalist State control over the university. The students have not been content to simply "challenge" -- they have begun managing their schools themselves.

Another fact special to the French situation is that the dynamism of the students' revolutionary movement has resulted in the workers moving, and launching the greatest strike movement France has ever known.

The student movement, while having a revolutionary character due to its demands and the actual self-management of the university only created a pre-revolutionary situation.

But when it resulted in the workers coming into action, it rapidly created an objectively revolutionary situation on a nationwide scale.

The traditional workers organisations (especially the FCP and CGT) were forced to take part in this movement with the aim of leading it and limiting it to strictly wage demands. They saw that otherwise there was a great danger of a link-up between students and workers, and that the workers might do as the students have done and begin to manage their factories and public services themselves.

The CP and CGT acted, in the final analysis, to prevent the revolutionary development of the workers' movement, something which had already begun, stimulated by the students' example.

The program confined to wage demands imposed on the workers' movement in no way corresponded to the most profound needs and aspirations of the working class - going far beyond the defence of material living standards - for a fundamental change of its proletarian condition.

For several days this underlying dynamism of the movement shook and frightened the traditional leaders who desperately manoeuvred to stem the flood.

### WAS IT REALLY A REVOLUTION ?

The dynamism of this situation, perfectly clear to all political observers on the spot, fully justified the characterisation of the situation which was rapidly created in France as objectively revolutionary, as the beginning of the Revolution.

Leon Trotsky characterised the situation in France on 9 June 1936 in the same way, despite the fact that there was a considerably smaller movement than in May-June 1968.

To say that it was the beginning of the Revolution means not only that the objective situation was revolutionary with the chance and need for a struggle for power, but also that the revolution that had begun would end in the long run either with the victory of the Revolution or with the victory of the counter-revolution in some form of bourgeois dictatorship.

The bonapartist, centrist "middle way" between those two alternatives is irremediably compromises. During the few critical days before de Gaulle's May 30 speech, not only did the widest layers of the masses want a radical change in the situation, but the possessing classes lived in the greatest fear, while their State vacillated on the verge of collapse. It is sufficient to read the comments of the capitalist press of this period. Sufficient to recall the actual powerlessness of the State apparatus at that time with repression being carried out almost totally by the police who were showing clear signs of lack of enthusiasm, exhaustion and demoralisation. We now know that de Gaulle even had really thought of resigning while a number of high functionaries and capitalists were ready to flee France. It would have been sufficient for the ten million workers on strike (with their dependents forming an absolute majority of the population) to transform their passive occupation of their work-places into active management of them and to be armed with the will to fight to the end, for everything to become possible.

The only thing lacking for several critical days, during decisive hours, was the presence of a revolutionary leadership audaciously grasping the chance History offered. Such opportunities inevitably arise and the role of a genuine revolutionary party is to await such opportunities and prepare for them adequately.

On this question the Platform of the Revolutionary Marxist Tendency states:

" The Party therefore does not simply exist to keep a permanent audience among the masses at no matter what political level. It exists to lead the class in the assault for power during a revolutionary crisis.

" Such crises are still inevitable in the deeply contradictory and explosive world situation of today. Indeed they are characteristic of it. They certainly do not occur with the frequency of the seasons of the year, nor every few years...

" The revolutionary Party only exists to grasp such revolutionary moments to make radical changes in

the situation and to open up the perspective of workers power.

"... the Party faces the following dilemma. In the period between crises it must either adapt to "realities" and inevitably degenerate into a parliamentarian, gradualist and reformist party certain of missing the opportunity provided by the crisis, or it must prepare for the inevitable crisis, protecting its revolutionary character, if it is to be victorious."

When History offered the chance of a Revolution in France; the mass revolutionary leadership still did not exist. That is a major lesson of the first phase of the French Socialist Revolution which has begun.

#### MARGINAL AND TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIPS

The different small "trotskyist", anarchist and pro-Chinese organisations to the left of the CP all played a very positive role as "detenators" -- as they have been called -- of the revolutionary process. But the large majority of the working class remained under the effective control of the CP and CGT. The leaders of these two organisations however practiced a cynically neo-reformist policy which inevitably, in the context of the revolutionary crisis, took the classical aspect of a "great betrayal". These leaderships, surprised by the sweep and strength of the movement showed only one constant anxiety: to channel it into demands acceptable to capitalism by preventing it going to the left.

In their propaganda, organisation and action, they did everything to achieve that aim. Desperately, right from the beginning, they fought to stop the link being formed between workers and students and to stop the workers demanding the right to manage their factories and to stop them abandoning the passive form of the strike and taking revolutionary action in a struggle for power.

These traditional leaders daily attacked "adventurers";



"provocateurs", "leftists", etc., and continuously repeated that they wished loyally, "in order and peace", to enter the game of "parliamentary democracy" and elections. When de Gaulle gave up the idea of a plebiscite and proposed instead elections, the traditional leaders of the CP and CGT gave a huge sigh of relief and sought to hastily liquidate the immense strike movement piece by piece and sector by sector, by fragmentation. Having once isolated the student movement from the workers they left the students to fight alone against police repression, and did not even react when the police reoccupied the Sorbonne -- the symbol of the greatest revolutionary movement France has known since the Paris Commune.

These crude neo-reformists who spoke ironically of "self-management" being a "crazy" slogan because they believed it would be unacceptable to big business, cynically prided themselves with being concerned with "realistic" immediate demands -- that is demands acceptable to capitalism. But if big business considered such demands acceptable and rejected even "participation" in management, it was simply because these "realistic" demands did not endanger the social system. Capitalism moreover hopes to remove the immediate and limited effect of these demands by a rise in prices, unemployment, etc.

The logic of the traditional leaders' attitudes is therefore to advance exclusively demands acceptable to capitalism because they are inoffensive to the social system. How is it possible in such conditions, to open the road to political power? Without transitional demands (which link immediate demands and those specifically socialist) the struggle is continually confined to fields acceptable to capitalism. There is no advance towards "power".

Transitional demands have only sense for those who believe that workers power will come through the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses.

These traditional leaders however loudly declared that their sole immediate aim was a seat in a "democratic" capitalist government following the elections. They are opposed to "participation" at the factory level, but are fully in support of "participation" and "co-

management" at the level of bourgeois political power.

So much does the fear of the events of Prague and Paris now haunt the most "stalinist" wing of the Kremlin which now sees a growing revolutionary storm growing in the USSR itself, that the Soviet leaders certainly applied all their influence on the FCP to have it capitulate to the Gaullist regime. That is certain. The FCP leaders themselves however have been for many years following a reformist practice and were only too happy to submit to such Soviet pressure. It is Being which determines Consciousness, and it is Practice which determines will and action and decisions.

The FCP can in no way turn itself into a revolutionary Party. A revolutionary wing can however emerge in revolt against the bureaucrats who have been completely lost for the Revolution, and that wing can merge with revolutionary forces outside the CP to form a new revolutionary mass organisation, which is now more necessary than ever.

### THE NEED FOR A REVOLUTIONARY MASS LEADERSHIP - THEN AND NOW

The immediate future of the French Revolution which has begun depends on the formation of such a leadership. A genuine revolutionary mass leadership is needed able to develop and apply transitional programme suited to the situation. Such a leadership could now arise from the fusion of all revolutionary forces which have emerged from the present revolutionary process, including above all those who have come out of the CP and CGT.

The need for such a leadership was felt with extreme urgency during the first phase of the Revolution, both politically and organisationally.

While the CP remained fixed in a classically reformist attitude, with only immediate demands being put forward and passive fragmentary forms of action adopted, the different left groups mostly advanced only vague slogans such as "Workers Power", "Workers Government", "Revolution" and "Socialism" without a precise and adequate transitional

programmes enabling them to advance to the final goal.

Even the students movement while in practice posing the question of the democratic management of the university and education in general, was limited to the "revolutionary phrase" without a precise transitional programme. At the very beginning of the movement an Estates-General of education, bringing together students, teachers and workers should have been called to draw up a precise Charter of demands and to decide on what precise base the regime should be confronted and on what base, if that failed, the first phase should be concluded. Similarly at no time were there serious discussions on the need to campaign to take the passive strike out of its blind alley by progressing to management of the factories and the formation of genuine bodies of dual power, towards which the whole dynamic of the movement was heading.

Also at no time was the attitude to the CP and CGT and the elections seriously envisaged, with attitudes floating perpetually (something understandable but politically inadequate) between revulsion and disgust with the traditional leaderships and the feeling (unhappily false) of having already overtaken them and therefore being able to ignore them.

There was thus no campaign from the very beginning for a democratic and revolutionary Constituent Assembly based on the committees, rather than elections for an ordinary Assembly. Much has been said of committees and they have been created. But these committees have in fact been and remained groups of revolutionary elements and are not genuine bodies of dual power which begin to manage production and public and social services.

The national movement of committees should have been linked with a campaign for a Constituent Assembly. The committees should fight for a Constituent Assembly, then be the base for it. In this way, the whole process would take on a "soviet" form and be both democratic and revolutionary. But all that cannot come spontaneously from the masses, but only through the persevering action of a revolutionary leadership.

Failing such a leadership, in a single revolutionary organisation, something still to be built; it was necessary and possible in those critical May days to work for the construction of a single provisional leadership in the form of a central revolutionary council with representatives from all revolutionary forces in the struggle, open to all others claiming to be working class and socialist, and speaking and acting with a single authoritative voice to the masses and militants who anxiously awaited such a united leadership.

In any case, at the moment, the second phase of the Revolution when it begins will depend on the central task of constructing such a revolutionary mass leadership. That will arise from the revolutionary movement either from the fusion of all the separate revolutionary forces including the "March 22 Movement", anarcho-communist groups, "trotskyists", the left opposition in the CP, etc., or from the fusion of such a movement with the PSU (Unified Socialist Party) rid of Mendes France and with a new name better suited to the present advanced politics of this formation in the recent crisis. The formation of such a united body must be examined and resolved in a spirit of great responsibility, far removed from the yearning for small sects.

The rapid formation of such a revolutionary mass leadership and organisation will decide the future of the French Revolution which has begun. For the revolutionary process will pass through several phases, before it is concluded either with the victory of the Revolution or of an open bourgeois dictatorship. The political, social and soon even economic balance, has been broken in France. The machinery of the Gaullist bonapartist has already been by-passed. De Gaulle will no longer be able to rule as a special-type of monarch. He is already indebted to the army and the extreme Right, whose political and military chiefs he has just been forced to pardon. That could be so to such an extent that de Gaulle could be forced to resign if he loses his freedom of action internally and externally and his "great social policy" based on "participation" put in question. In the shadows the worst forces of Reaction surprised, frightened and paralysed during the May events are now looking to their guns and are no more ready to surrender. European and world capitalism

will stimulate and second them in this task. The second phase of the Revolution will see a Right better prepared than before and determined to fight. To deal with this phase, serious organisation, envisaging all possibilities, including a possible military coup d'etat, and revolutionary self-defence through organisation of workers militias protecting the action of the committees, must be undertaken.

France will witness in the coming period great class struggles which shall have repercussions through Europe and the world. The echo the French events has had among widely varied student movements -- from Belgrade to Rio and Ankara, is nothing to what is going to happen when the European and other universities reopen and the more profound repercussions of these events are felt in the Spanish, Italian, English and world-working class. A situation full of revolutionary potential is being created in Europe, interacting with that now existing in the Colonial Revolution and the Workers States.

If this situation is not to evolve towards Reaction and war but rather to victories for the Revolution which will change the face of the world from the West to the East, a revolutionary marxist mass leadership must be urgently built in France and throughout the world.

22 June 1968.

# 13. michel pablo

## Self-management and the Revolution

"Self-management" has never been discussed in a capitalist country to the extent that it is at present in France.

In just a few weeks, the idea of self-management has gained ground in the most diverse circles - even the State, personified by de Gaulle, now advocates "participation". (1)

Of course, not all who discuss self-management give this concept the same content. But the common denominator of all those who do speak of "participation" is that they all admit the necessity for democratic participation by producers and citizens in the management of economic, social and political life. What differentiates them of course is the extent to which this participation in management is to be taken, and its concrete form.

It would be very interesting and useful to collect all the widely differing views on self-management, to show at what stage this idea became, consciously or unconsciously, in a clear or confused way, a forceful idea, a central concept, a starting point from which it was felt to be both possible and necessary to

remodel the whole of social life.

It is significant that the organizations claiming to represent the working class have spoken least about self-management. The CP and CGT, for example, whose whole role in the crisis, judged quite objectively, warrants being called "the great betrayal", have spoken ironically of the "crazy", "confused" slogans about self-management. These leaderships are not concerned with putting forward slogans, dynamic enough to challenge the whole capitalist regime - and are even less concerned about the conquest of power and about socialism. Like all classically reformist leaderships, they preferred the well-worn "realism" of a minimum programme around wages only.

But when, after all, Brezhnev sees the institution of workers councils and the introduction of self-management in Czechoslovakia as concessions made by a "social democratic" government (that of Dubcek) to a rightist current, it is not surprising to see Waldeck Rochet, faithful disciple of the Stalinist school and its soviet <sup>epigones</sup> ~~epigones~~, being careful not to "innovate" on this question.

The attitude taken by various so-called "trotskyist" groups is more painful to observe.

For in fact, none of them - neither the group of Lambert, nor Franks, nor Voix Ouvrière - have systematically campaigned for self-management. They have merely spoken occasionally of "workers' management of economic life" and, more frequently of 'workers' control'.

At no time did they campaign for control of strike bound factories, enterprises and social services by the workers themselves, organised into workers' councils.

At no time have they made explicit that the democratic socialism they are talking about, is a system based on self-management by producers and citizens at all levels, from base to summit; and in all spheres - economic, political, cultural and social.

They are imprisoned by the concept of an essentially, if not exclusively, state-managed economy, centrally planned along traditional Soviet lines. They find it very difficult to draw the lessons in a critical way from the Soviet experience, and to link up with the deep current of a new generation who aspire to a socialism, above all, really democratic and self-managed. Because of "fractionalism" they shrink from freely using such a supposedly "Pabloite" slogan as "self-management".

In fact, only the PSU and to a certain extent, the CFDT, along with "anarcho-communist" groups have spoken about "self-management".

The PSU, in particular, has developed the theme of "democratic socialism" based on self-determination by workers, as far as it can within the framework of its general, left-centrist line - this has gained them certain prestige among radicalized strata of the "educated" and even among some young workers.

For a long time our own tendency has been the best prepared to understand self-management as a burning reality and to grasp all its dynamism at every stage of the revolutionary process.

Thanks to this preparation our tendency was able to put forward transitional slogans best suited to the situation, during the first phase of the revolutionary crisis opened up in France.

It is important in a situation, like that in France, not to put forward generalised and abstract slogans such as "long live socialism", "long live revolution", "long live workers' power (or government)" etc., but to link these general goals with transitional slogans which help the masses struggle for these goals.

The slogan of self-management, in particular, is both a transitional slogan and a plainly socialist one.

From this point of view, it was absolutely right and necessary to insist, as we did, that the workers who followed the students' movement, occupy the factories and various social services and put



into practice, as well, the essential message of this movement: i. e. by beginning to manage their work places as the students did the University. The students progressed from a verbal "challenge" to neo-capitalist society, to the revolutionary act of abolishing, in practice, the control of this society over their schools, by having teachers and students manage these themselves.

The workers ought to have done the same, by rejecting the passive strike and passive occupation of their workplaces, moving on to managing them themselves. Once this had been achieved, they would have automatically leapt one stage forward, to arrive at a level of qualitatively higher struggle, fully opening up the necessity, and also the perspective of power.

It is through self-management that the question of the struggle for power is both raised and realised - for self-management, even if limited to workplaces alone at the beginning, signifies the abolition of capitalist power in practice.

So it is not necessary to seize power first of all, in order to fight for self-management.

On the contrary the question of self-management must be raised in the workplaces in order to begin the struggle for total power.

The nature of self-management as a transitional slogan par excellence, lies in this logical progression, and this dynamic chain of events.

Those who bring up practical problems of self-management in an individual factory, so as to refute the validity of the slogan, are ill-intentioned advocates of a bad cause. For it is certainly not a question of practising self-management in a regime which remains capitalist.

Self-management, as a transitional slogan is only applicable in a revolutionary period such as that in France in May and June, before there is rapid evolution from a dual power situation to

seizure of power.

It is in this perspective that concrete solutions to practical questions about the management of this or that factory, enterprise or social service, will be found. Besides, immediate management of plants and public services directly affecting the lives of workers (e.g. food supplies, transport, health facilities) would show concretely to the workers and population as a whole the possibility and efficacy of workers' power.

Such a partial application of self-management would quickly become contagious. In France, during the first phase of the revolutionary crisis, everything depended on this precise question: the transformation of passive strikes and occupations into active workers' management.

Only in some factories, mainly in the provinces (especially at Nantes) led by vanguard elements, was the question of their self-management raised in a practical way.

But, in general, in other factories, the counter-revolutionary control of the CP and CGT was maintained.

There was no effective link between workers and students, and, in practice, the message of the students was not transmitted to workers: i.e. to manage their workplaces as the students had begun to manage their places of education.

But it is almost certain that when the new wave of the revolution breaks out again, the slogan of self-management will find infinitely better ground for its rapid, practical propagation, perhaps like a real trail of gun-powder.

Our tendency has, on a number of occasions in different documents, exhaustively dealt with the importance of this slogan of self-management for the real content of democratic socialism after the seizure of power. (2) For us, to build a socialist society, self-managed at all levels and in all spheres, presupposes a concept of the State, Party and trade-unions, which is very different from the so-

called "leninist" one.

There must not be institutions to which the class, in practice, permanently delegates power, but rather, institutions which show in practice their desire to help the class overcome its proletarian condition, culturally, economically and organisationally, and which help the class play its role as a ruling class more and more fully.

Therefore an effort must be made from the very beginning not only to formally institutionalise self-management but also to help the workers effectively manage society. Also, there must be an effort made from the very beginning to remove the proletarian condition economically, by adopting a method of remuneration based on labour supplied - that is according to the mass of value produced by each worker, after democratically decided deductions for depreciation, investment and maintenance of society.

In any society in a transitional stage between capitalism and socialism, self-management must necessarily be adequately co-ordinated with the plan on one hand, and the market on the other.

All these elements comprise our concept of the total functioning of self-management within the framework of a regime where revolution has been victorious.

Michel Pablo  
21 June 1968

(1) "Participation" is certainly "co-management" with the boss, and above all, profit sharing.

But that de Gaulle declares that capitalism is "outmoded" and that he believes workers should have some say in running the enterprises is clearly a sign of the times.

For taking him at his word on this, opens the way for workers and their organisations to demand at least workers' control over enterprises and the opening of their books.

It is astonishing that traditional organisations have treated it as a simple "ruse" by the regime. Only the CFDT, on competing with the CGT has dared speak of "trade-union power" in enterprises and has flirted with the idea of self-management. Self-management is not simply "trade union power" but rather complete "workers' power". The role of the trade unions in relation to self-management is not to have the power of the workers delegated to trade-unions, but to help the workers to learn and exercise self-management.

(2) See, among other writings, the preface to my work on "The Dossier on self-management in Algeria". (Cahiers de l'Autogestion No. 4, Editions Anthropos 15 rue Racine, Paris)

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