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David Berry
Anarchism and 1968
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new social movements (feminism, lesbian and gay rights, environmentalism, prisoners' rights, immigrants' rights) and in education and culture. 1968 represented 'the ideological tomb of the concept of the "leading role"' of the industrial proletariat':

> After 1968, none of the "other" groups in struggle—neither women nor racial "minorities" nor sexual "minorities" nor the handicapped nor the "ecologists" [...]—would ever again accept the legitimacy of "waiting" upon some other revolution. And since 1968, the "old left" movements have themselves become increasingly embarrassed about making, have indeed hesitated to continue to make, such demands for the "postponement" of claims until some presumed post-revolutionary epoch.[108]

In that sense, it can be argued that 1968, as well as being the last nail in the coffin of orthodox Communism, also effectively redefined politics, and that we can find in 1968 the roots of the 'unofficial politics' which characterises the various 'anti-capitalist' movements of the 1990s and 2000s[109]:

> World-historical movements define new epochs in the cultural, political, and economic dimensions of society. *Even in failure*, they present new ideas and values which become common sense as time passes. World-historical movements qualitatively reformulate the meaning of freedom for millions of human beings.[110]

[108] Wallerstein, '1968', 437, 439.

[109] Simon Tormey, *Anti-capitalism a beginner's guide* (London: Oneworld, 2013), Ch. 2. Katsiaficas makes the same argument in *Subversion.*

[110] Katsiaficas, *Imagination*, 8.

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all workers irrespective of union membership: the Italian ‘unitary base committees’, strike or workers’ committees elsewhere. Experiments in self-management in France, Portugal and elsewhere were extensions of democracy to everyday working life.

The Legacy of 1968

Despite attempts to portray 1968 as having achieved little, the ‘long 1960s’ did in fact achieve a great deal, even if it fell short of the ‘total revolution’ envisaged by many of 1968’s protagonists. Marwick provided plenty of empirical evidence for ‘a “revolution”, or “transformation” in material conditions, lifestyles, family relationships and personal freedoms for the vast majority of ordinary people’.[104] Across Europe, workers (blue and white collar) gained significant wage increases in the years following 1968, as well as ‘the only significant reduction of working time since World War II’[105] thanks to the decade of heightened social conflict which continued well into the 1970s.[106]

But perhaps other less tangible changes are more important:

> [T]he concrete experience of a qualitatively different way of life, the exposure to non-hierarchical modes of social interaction, the lived environmentof solidarity, the heated atmosphere of open debate, the concrete strivings for a common and mutually beneficial system-transcending goal.[107]

1968 was a source of hope and inspiration for at least a generation and ushered in a period of militancy: in the workplace, in the

[104] Marwick, *The Sixties*, 14–15.

[105] Pietro Basso, *Modern Times, Ancient Hours: Working Lives in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2003), 30.

[106] See Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pissaro (Eds), *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 2 vols.

[107] Horn, *Spirit*, 194.

The actual phrase 'participatory democracy' may have been coined in 1962 by the SDS authors of the Port Huron Statement, but before that, as Horn reminds us, the practice came out of the experimental communities developed through the 'grassroots democracy' of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (created in 1960) in the American Deep South: 'a commitment to surmount the usual barrier of status, a commitment on the part of participants to trust each other as equals, not by dividing power up equally, but by fostering each person's self-development'.[103] Direct democracy, dialogue and mass participation were adopted spontaneously throughout the American and European New Left movements, beginning with Berkeley's aptly named Free Speech Movement (1964–1965). 1960s student movements were characterised everywhere by the frequency of mass meetings or general assemblies, and later by innumerable working groups, commissions and sub-committees which enabled the participation of an even greater proportion of activists. Occupations, whether of university buildings or workplaces, became equally frequent across America and Europe and provided the physical space and time for such deliberations. An extension of this desire to liberate thought and speech can be seen in the spread of alternative curricula and forms of education, from the Freedom Schools that spread through African American communities to the Free University of Berkeley in 1965, and then 'free' or 'critical' universities in Italy, Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and France in 1966–1968. As for labour unrest in this period, it was also characterised by the normalisation of large general assemblies in factories and office buildings, and these, similar to what occurred in the universities, spawned commissions and sub-commissions. More permanent organisms were also created by striking workers, bringing together

[103] Francesca Polletta, *Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 128, quoted in Horn, *Spirit*, 196.

Abstract

The events of 1968, especially in France, are often thought of as some kind of anarchist or at least anarchistic revolution, yet surprisingly little scholarly work has been done on the role of the anarchists or of anarchist ideas in those events from a historical perspective. This chapter will therefore examine the *événements* of May–June 1968 in France, drawing not only on the existing secondary literature but also on original research on primary sources including periodicals and pamphlets and militants' personal archives. It will examine the role of the anarchists in the events, the extent to which the 'spirit of 68' can be said to have been libertarian or anarchistic (despite the predominance of Marxists among the *gauchistes*), and the impact of the events on the anarchist movement. It will be suggested that 1968 can be seen both as the culmination of post-war struggles over the (re)definition of anarchism and, as Tormey (2004) has argued, the beginning of a new radicalism strongly informed by anarchism.

1968 in Anarchist Historiography

1968 is one of those dates—alongside, perhaps, 1871 (the Paris Commune), 1936 (the Spanish Revolution), 1917 (before the Bolsheviks tightened their grip on the Soviets) and 1956 (the Hungarian Revolution)—which often feature as high-water marks in anarchist histories. But why is this? Why is 1968 of interest to present-day anarchists? To what extent were the ideas and practice of the 'sixty-eighters' anarchistic? What exactly was the involvement of self-identifying anarchists at the time? How did they respond, and did 1968 have an effect on the anarchist movement or anarchist theory? This chapter will try to address these questions.

‘1968’

‘1968’ is often used as shorthand to refer to a much longer period which saw profound economic, social, political and cultural changes. What Katsiaficas calls the ‘world historical social movement of 1968’ was clearly not limited to one year: ‘After all, it was in 1955 that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the back of the bus and in 1977 that the Italian counterculture crashed head-on into the forces of order’.[1] Specifically with regard to France, Zancarini-Fournel argues that the *années 1968* began in 1962 (with the end of France’s colonial wars and the introduction of a directly elected presidency) and ended in 1981 (with the election of the Socialist François Mitterrand as president, and the ‘decisive weakening, in the social and political cultures of the left, of the idea of revolution’).[2] The precise chronology chosen varies depending on local particularities.

Until relatively recently there had been a tendency to study local instances of the 1968 rebellions more or less in isolation from those in other countries, or at best to provide a ‘simple catalogue of the national variants’, a series of juxtaposed or at best comparative national studies.[3] Sirinelli makes the case for a ‘world history’ approach to 1968. The near simultaneity of the ‘1968 moment’, as he calls it, in so many very diverse parts of the world—the USA, Canada, Central and South America, Western Europe, Francoist Spain, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, India, Japan, Senegal and so on—seems difficult to explain just in terms of cultural transfers, the international dissemination of ideas, ‘copycat’ actions and so

[1] Georgy Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics. European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 1.

[2] Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, ‘Conclusion’, in Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, Robert Frank, Marie-Françoise Lévy and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (Eds), *Les années 68. Le temps de la contestation* (Brussels: Complexe, 2008), 495–502 (497).

[3] Jean-François Sirinelli, ‘Le moment 1968, un objet pour la *World history*?’, *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société*, no. 6 (September–December 2008), 1.

The Spirit of 68

1968 was profoundly antiauthoritarian, questioning the legitimacy of all power relations, of all institutions, of all imposed social roles. Katsiaficas stresses the attack on social identities and divisions and the implicit demand for equality:

> The animating principle of the world spirit of 1968 was to forge new identities based on the negation of existing divisions: in place of patriotism and national chauvinism, international solidarity; instead of hierarchy and patterns of domination and submission, self-management and individual self-determination; in place of patriarchy and racism, egalitarian humanism;rather than competition, cooperation; rather than the accumulation of wealth, attempts to end poverty; instead of the domination of nature, ecological harmony.[101]

For Goodman, the defining characteristic of 1968 was participatory democracy, ‘the chief idea in the Port Huron Statement’:

> It is a cry for a say in the decisions that shape our lives, against top-down direction, social engineering, corporate and political centralization, absentee owners, brainwashing by mass media. In its connotations, it encompasses no taxation without representation, grass-roots populism, the town meeting, congregationalism, federalism, Student Power, BlackPower, workers’ management, soldiers’ democracy, guerrilla organization. It is, of course, the essence of anarchist social order, the voluntary federation of self-managed enterprises.[102]

[101] Katsiaficas, *Subversion*, 1.

[102] Goodman, ‘The Black Flag’, 93–94.

> inevitable obverse of the concentration of power at the top.[97]

Suggesting that both capitalist and 'socialist' countries saw 'a distinct, though fairly modest growth in the numbers of the anarchists themselves', Arblaster also argued for a more diffuse but still significant influence of anarchist ideas[98]:

> It would be absurd to suggest that the majority of the New Left have read deeply in the writings of Proudhon or Kropotkin […]. Nevertheless […] anarchist ideas and attitudes have been widely adopted outside the 'official' anarchist movement itself. And perhaps this is in itself a paradoxical tribute to the influence of anarchism. The intense resistance among young radicals to being labelled, towards fixed ideologies and doctrines, and formal political parties and sects, has led to their fighting shy of identifying themselves even with anarchism. And, after all, not even the anarchist movement has entirely succeeded in avoiding the kind of bureaucratic fossilization to which the established parties of the left have fallen prey.[99]

This is similar to George Woodcock's conclusion about the apparent revival of anarchism: 'The old revolutionary sect has not been resurrected, but in its place has appeared a moral-political movement typical of the age'.[100]

[97] Anthony Arblaster, 'The Relevance of Anarchism', *Socialist Register* (1971), 157–184 (174).

[98] Ibid., 167.

[99] Ibid., 167.

[100] George Woodcock, 'Anarchism Revisited', *Commentary* (1 August 1968), 55.

on, although this was clearly an important aspect of 1968. Militants the world over read the same texts: Marx (especially the *Paris Manuscripts*) and Mao, Wilhelm Reich, C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse ('the transnational lodestar of the 1960s new left', according to Horn[4]), Camus and Sartre. And militants criss-crossed the world in a transnational network of leftists: activists from all over Europe and the Americas attended the International Vietnam Conference in West Berlin in February 1968; the Ulster activist Eamonn McCann heard Marcuse and Stokely Carmichael speak in London in 1967[5]; Rudi Dutschke spoke in Prague in the spring of 1968[6]; Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Tariq Ali and other internationally prominent activists appeared together in a BBC studio in June 1968; and so on. The adoption of a transnational perspective has thus come to be seen as essential.

This was always true of the 'world-system' approach developed by Wallerstein and others:

> It was not by chance alone that the Tet offensive in Vietnam occurred in the same year as the Prague Spring, the May events in France, the student rebellion in West Germany, the assassination of Martin Luther King, the takeover of Columbia University, riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and the pre-Olympic massacre in MexicoCity.[7]

[4] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 146–147.

[5] Simon Prince, 'The Global Revolt of 1968 and Northern Ireland', *The Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 851–875 (866).

[6] See 'Rudi Dutschke on Revolutionary Democratic Socialism' in *Independent Socialist*, 6 (August 1968).

[7] George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left. A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), 4. A revised and expanded version of this is to be published as *The Global Imagination of 1968: Revolution and Counterrevolution* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018).

The years 1967–1973 were a crisis point in terms of the long-term trends in the history of the capitalist 'world system' according to Wallerstein, and the unrest experienced in different parts of the world should be seen as a whole:

> The revolution of 1968 was a revolution; it was a single revolution. It was marked by demonstrations, disorder and violence in many parts of the world over a period of at least three years. Its origins, consequences, and lessons cannot be analyzed correctly by appealing to the particular circumstances of the local manifestations of this global phenomenon, however much the local factors conditioned the details of the political and social struggles in each locality. […] It was one of the great, formative events in the history of our modern world-system.[8]

As for the targets of the 1968 protests, what united them according to Wallerstein was, first, their critique of 'US hegemony in the world system (and Soviet acquiescence in that hegemony)', and, second, an attack on 'the "old left" antisystemic movements'.[9] Wallerstein consequently rejects those interpretations which primarily emphasise cultural liberalisation: 'Counter-culture was part of revolutionary euphoria, but was not politically central to 1968'.[10] I propose to look at what are argued to be common characteristics of the various instances of '1968' in the conclusion. But for now I

[8] Immanuel Wallerstein, '1968, Revolution in the world-system. Theses and queries', *Theory and Society*, 18 (1989), 431–449 (431). See also Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Anti-Systemic Movements* (London: Verso, 1989), and the first chapter of Katsiaficas, *Imagination.*

[9] Wallerstein, '1968', ibid., 433, 434. Note that Wallerstein uses the term 'old left' comparatively loosely, including in it the US Democratic Party.

[10] Ibid., 436. See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

Some have argued that 1968 globally was strongly influenced by the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist traditions.[93] As the US anarchist Paul Goodman put it:

> Needless to say, officials of the capitalist countries say that the agitators are Communists, and Communists say they are bourgeois revisionists. In my opinion, there is a totally different political philosophy underlying—it is anarchism.[94]

For Goodman, 'the protesting students are anarchist because they are in a historical situation to which anarchism is their only possible response'[95]—namely, the Cold War and the dominance of the military-industrial complex, the abuse of science and technology and impending ecological crisis, the centralisation and technocratic management of society and the hollowing out of democracy, the subordination of education to the needs of capital. One should add to Goodman's list the failure of the institutional left. This was all analysed in detail in the 1962 Port Huron Statement[96] and, in somewhat less accessible language, in the Situationists' *Poverty of Student Life* in 1966. As Arblaster put it:

> Anarchism, with its emphasis on self-activity, on people having direct power over their own lives, makes an obviously relevant challenge and response to the feelings of helplessness and powerlessness which are the

[93] Paul Goodman, 'The Black Flag of Anarchism', *New York Times Magazine* (14 July 1968), in Taylor Stoehr (Ed), *Drawing the Line Once Again. Paul Goodman's Anarchist Writings* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 89–97. On France, see Jacques Julliard, 'Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et révolution étudiante', in *Esprit* (June/July 1968), 1037–1046.

[94] Ibid., 89.

[95] Ibid., 91.

[96] See Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: The Visionary Call of the 1960s Revolution* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005).

rect democracy, revocable delegates, the abolition of hierarchy, the permanent creative participation of the masses, etc.[89]).

Some have argued that 1968 represented the birth of a new kind of anarchism. Duteuil suggests that the anarchist students and others involved in the various dissident groups 'shared a certain vision of anarchism far removed from the non-violent, humanistic individualism that had been prevalent in the movement and especially within the FA for some years'. They were what he called 'the forerunners of a slow and ongoing transformation of the anarchist movement that would take it back to more social and movement-centred activities, and more militant ones'.[90]

Morin wrote in July 1968: 'It seems to me that we can speak both of a resurrection and of a renaissance of anarchy among the students'.[91] By 'resurrection', he meant that the students in 1968 wanted to 'change their lives as much as they wanted to change society', that they were inspired partly by the American beatnik and hippy movements and partly by a rediscovery of anarchism. By 'renaissance', he meant that the students had taken anarchism, with its exclusive references to anarchist thinkers of the nineteenth century, and had integrated aspects of the thought of Marx and of Freud to produce a kind of 'libertarian communism':

> Searching for a theoretical justification for their desire for freedom and authenticity, they came across different currents of modern thought, and it is from this extremely open revisionism that the renaissance of the libertarian movement was born.[92]

[89] Quoted in Maitron, ibid., 564–565.

[90] Jean-Pierre Duteuil, *Nanterre 1968: Notes on the background to the 22 March Group* (Hastings: Christie Books, 2014).

[91] Morin, 'L'anarchisme en 1968', 22.

[92] Ibid., 22–23.

intend to focus on the country which has commonly been regarded as the paradigm or epicentre of the global revolt and the one whose influence and impact were greatest: France. For as Brinton put it:

> The French events have a significance that extends far beyond the frontiers of modern France. They will leave their mark on the history of the second half of the 20th century. […] A whole epoch has just come to an end: the epoch during which people could say, with a semblance of verisimilitude, that 'it couldn't happen here'. Another epoch is starting: that in which people *know* that revolution is possible under the conditions of modern bureaucratic capitalism.[11]

The French 1968

It is not my intention here to engage in any detail with the massive literature on the French 1968 or with the many different interpretations that have been produced, but a brief survey of certain trends enables us to draw out their political implications. Already by 1970, French political scientists were able to list eight main kinds of interpretation.[12] By the time of the 20th anniversary, the dominant view was that 1968 was about the 'baby boomer' generation, a generation which embodied rapid cultural change and which came into conflict with a society in which conservative values and attitudes still prevailed and whose political structures were widely perceived as authoritarian. The idea that 1968 represented above

[11] Maurice Brinton, *Paris: May 1968* (Solidarity Pamphlet no. 30, June 1968), 1. Reproduced in David Goodway (Ed), *For Workers' Power. The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Edinburgh and Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 223–256.

[12] Philippe Bénéton and Jean Touchard, 'Les interprétations de la crise de mai–juin 1968', *Revue française de science politique*, 20e année, no. 3 (1970), 503–544. For a more recent overview, see Julian Jackson, 'The Mystery of May 1968', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4 (Fall 2010), 625–653.

all a cultural revolution (liberalisation in interpersonal relations, morals, sexuality, dress, music, etc.) was further consolidated by Marwick's monumental study, *The Sixties*.[13] A derivative of this interpretation was Lipovetsky's postmodernist notion of the 'second individualist revolution', according to which the 1968 generation's emphasis on the freedom of the hedonistic individual prepared the ground for neo-liberalism.[14] Such perceptions were strengthened by the very public mea culpas of a number of prominent actors of the French student movement who now dismissed their youthful radicalism as hyperbole expressed in the outdated language of class conflict and socialism, which disguised what was, in retrospect, just a desire for individual freedom. Others have been rightly sceptical about the unjustified focus on the opinions of an unrepresentative number of media stars—besides which, the Situationists' 1966 pamphlet *De la misère en milieu étudiant* had already been scathing about attempts to write off the wave of protests around the world, from Berkeley to Amsterdam to Japan, as being explicable simply by patronising reference to a supposedly eternally rebellious youth.[15]

[13] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Marwick's view has been challenged by Dominic Sandbrook's *Never Had It So Good, 1956–1963: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown, 2005).

[14] Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Ère du vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). For a critique, see Cornelius Castoriadis, 'Les mouvements des années soixante', in Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, *Mai 68: La Brèche* suivi de *Vingt ans après* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1988), 183–197.

[15] UNEF, AFGE de Strasbourg, *De la misère en milieu étudiant: considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier* (supplement to *21–27 Etudiants de France*, 16 (1966), 12–13. For an English translation, see *On the Poverty of Student Life*, in Ken Knabb (Ed), *Situationist International Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2007), 319–331 (326).

'never since its appearance in different countries […], has anarchism been as weak both in terms of its numerical strength or its intellectual contribution', the principal reason being 'ideological, philosophical, ethical and tactical confusion'.[83] Of course anarchists became involved in the movement, but as Joyeux, a leading figure in the FA, put it, 'we jumped on a train that was already moving!'[84] But the anarchist movement as a whole was overwhelmed by 1968: 'Their small numbers and their notorious unpreparedness for dealing with such situations reduced them to the status of spectators'.[85] Nor did anarchist organisations grow as a result of 1968, and in the early 1970s the movement was as numerically weak and as divided as before 1968.[86] The anarchist presence in the occupied universities in terms of groups and literature was minimal.[87] References in movement literature were to Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and Mao, not the anarchist canon. On the rare occasion that anarchism was referred to, it was negative. The Situationists had a certain profile but did not identify as anarchists and even objected to the fact that the bourgeois press assimilated them to the anarchist movement.[88] (Having said that, the conflation was justified to an extent given the Situationists' aims, as defined in a leaflet of May 1968 produced by the *Comité Enragés-Internationale Situationniste*: di-

[83] Gaston Leval, 'Pour une renaissance du mouvement libertaire' in *Anarchi e Anarchia*, 588, 597.

[84] Maurice Joyeux, 'Mai 68 … sous les plis du drapeau noir', *Le Monde libertaire* (June 1988). See David Porter, 'French anarchists and the continuing power of May 1968', *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2016), 143–159.

[85] Biard, *Histoire*, 183.

[86] Jean Maitron, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en France* (Paris: Maspero, 1983), vol. 2, 131.

[87] Jean Maitron, 'La pensée anarchiste traditionnelle et la révolte des jeunes', in *Anarchi e Anarchia*, 543–578.

[88] René Viénet, *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), quoted in Maitron, 'La pensée anarchiste traditionnelle', ibid., 562–563.

theory'. Any kind of 'institutional structure […] stifles the vitality of the revolution'.[79]

More experienced anarchists condemned the leftists' 'spontaneism' and faith in the efficacy of 'exemplary action' as being both a return to a failed nineteenth-century tactic and as naïve.[80] In their eyes, the failure of the May insurrection was thus due to the 'spontaneism' of groups such as the M22M.[81] Even Guérin, a champion of revolutionary spontaneity and close to Cohn-Bendit, had reservations, and it seems to have been the failure of 1968 which pushed him and others away from anarchism and towards a kind of libertarian Marxism (especially Luxemburgism). As he wrote in 1971:

> Apart from a handful of unrepentant 'spontaneists', obsessive adversaries of organisation because of their dread of the bureaucratic peril and who have as a result condemned themselves to sterility, no militant, either among the students or in the working class, believes today that it would be possible to make a lasting revolution without an 'active minority'.[82]

Conclusions

Was '1968' Anarchist?

The consensus among both activists and researchers is that the anarchist movement was at a low ebb in 1968. According to Leval, a veteran of anarchist struggles in France, Spain and Argentina,

[79] Ibid., 32–33.

[80] Extract from Gino Cerrito, *Anarchismo 70, i Quaderni dell'Antistato* 2 (1971), in *Le congrès de Carrare*, ibid., 157–166 (160).

[81] Ibid., 164.

[82] Daniel Guérin, *Rosa Luxembourg et la spontanéité révolutionnaire* (Paris: Spartacus, 1982; first published 1971), 12.

Such 'rewritings', Gobille concludes, have rendered 1968 'unrecognisable'.[16] As Ross noted, examination of primary sources such as pamphlets, newspapers, leaflets and so on shows clearly what the 'ideological targets' of 1968 were: 'These were three: capitalism, American imperialism, and Gaullism. How then do we arrive, twenty years later, at a consensus view of '68 as a mellow, sympathetic, poetic "youth revolt" and lifestyle reform?'[17] As Prince has put it:

> Sixty-eighters were not turning away from politics in the pursuit of pleasure: isolated individuals found happiness in collective action. They believed that they were part of a global struggle to emancipate, not the individual from outdated ways of living, but humanity from imperialism, capitalism, and bureaucracy. Instead of a fleeting festival of liberation, '68 emerges as the culmination of the post-war revision of Marxism and socialism as a whole.[18]

And as we have seen, '1968' cannot be reduced to 'May' or even to 1968. That would exclude the pre-history of the events of 1968, as well as the frequently violent state repression, worker unrest and leftist violence that continued well into the 1970s:

> In fact, a whole fifteen- to twenty-year period of radical political culture is occulted from view, apolitical culture whose traces were manifest in the growth of a small but significant opposition to the Algerian War and in the embrace by many of the enormous successes of the colonial revolutions. This political

[16] Boris Gobille, *Mai 68* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), 5.

[17] Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002), 8.

[18] Prince, 'Global Revolt', 852.

> culture was also manifest in the recurrent outbreaks of worker unrest in French factories throughout the mid-1960s, in the rise of an anti-Stalinist, critical Marxist perspective available in countless journals that flourished between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s.[19]

In sum, revisiting 1968 is not mere nostalgia and merits serious attention from anarchists and other socialists not content with a choice between dictatorship and welfarecapitalism.

The 'Events' of May–June 1968[20]

With hindsight, it is easy to point to worker unrest earlier in the 1960s, notably a successful and popular miners' strike in 1963 and strikes in other industries in 1967, which foreshadowed 1968. Be that as it may, when student protests and then strikes erupted in May and rapidly spread, it came as a complete surprise to most people, something which fed into early interpretations that the events were incomprehensible and irrational outbursts. It is often simply stated that the immediate trigger for the disturbances was a student campaign for the liberalisation of attitudes to sex, and specifically protests about regulations prohibiting male access to women's halls of residence at Nanterre University (building on similar protests in various French universities since 1965). This is true but misleading, and it is important to point out that the group at the heart of the protests, the *Mouvement du 22 mars* (22 March Movement, M22M), initially grew out of protests against US imperialism

[19] Ross, *May '68*, 8.

[20] For an excellent summary in English, see Rod Kedward, *La Vie en bleu. France and the French since 1900* (London: Penguin, 2005), 416–431. For a chronology of 1968 in 19 European countries, see Rolf Werenskjold, 'Chronology of Events of Protest in Europe 1968' in Martin Klimke, Jacco Pekelder and Joachim Scharloth (Eds), *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960–1980* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2011), 283–307.

Situationists were also very important for the M22M's theoretical horizons, and they distributed copies of *The Poverty of Student Life*, of Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967).[75] Scornful of orthodoxy and labels, many nevertheless accepted the labels 'libertarian Marxist' or 'anarchist' when pushed.[76] For Biard, an anarchist active in the May movement, the M22M incarnated perfectly 'the diffuse anti-authoritarian spirit which marked the movement in the early days both in the universities and in workplaces'.[77]

A number of young French leftists, including Cohn-Bendit, attended the international anarchist congress in Carrara in Italy in August–September 1968. The conference represented a clear generational clash. The leftists' argument was that 'the May insurrection was not the work of a specific organisation' but 'a perfect example of the spontaneity of the masses, and various revolutionary movements, especially the anarchists, played a leading role in triggering it'.[78] Traditional anarchism represented 'an orthodoxy which was completely overwhelmed in the street by the events of May': the revolution would be made 'through direct action and not through

concerned with action rather than theorising. See Niek Pas, 'Subcultural Movements: The Provos', in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Eds), *1968 in Europe: a history of protest and activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13–21.

[75] Dreyfus-Armand and Cohn-Bendit, 'Le Mouvement du 22 mars', 124–125. Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967), translated by Ken Knabb as *The Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).

[76] See, for example, Cohn-Bendit, *Le gauchisme*. Guérin reports that he borrowed the term 'libertarian Marxist' for the title of his book *Pour un marxisme libertaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1969) from some young Italian leftists in Trento and Milan. See his 'Le marxisme libertaire' in *Anarchi e Anarchia nel mondo contemporaneo* (Turin: Fondazione Luigi Einaudi, 1971), 442–457 (443).

[77] Biard, *Histoire*, 195.

[78] Jean-Jacques Lebel in *Le congrès de Carrare*, 32.

was ‘primarily a tactical concept enabling activist minorities to attack by word and deed the numerous “forms of repression” of bourgeois society’.[69]

Many of the leading figures in the M22M had previously been involved in one or other of the small anarchist groups which had distanced themselves from the FA, rejecting what they saw as a form of anarchist dogmatism. They had wanted ‘not so much to renew anarchism as to renew revolutionary theory’.[70] Journals such as *Noir et Rouge*, *Informations Correspondence Ouvrières* (ICO) and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (which of course came out of the Marxist tradition but was described by Morin as representing ‘an original synthesis of Marxism and anarchism’[71] and was immensely influential on many anarchists[72]) were devoted to a fundamental reconsideration of radical politics. ‘In this crucible, anarchism was smelted with other ideologies and practices’.[73] This was facilitated by the M22M’s contacts with Trotskyists, with students from Berkeley and especially from the German SDS. They learned lessons from the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt, the 1920 Italian factory committees, Trotsky’s critique of Stalinism, Mao’s emphasis on the role of the peasantry, Marcuse’s analysis of the repressive nature of modern capitalism and the tactics adopted by the Berkeley students and the Dutch ‘Provos’.[74] The

[69] Gombin, ‘The Ideology and Practice’, 415.

[70] Ibid., 422.

[71] Edgar Morin, ‘L’Anarchisme en 1968’, *Magazine littéraire* 19 (1968), available at www.magazine-litteraire.com/archives/ar_anar.htm (accessed 6 October 2002). See Jean-Christophe Angaut, ‘Beyond Black and Red: The Situationists and the Legacy of the Workers’ Movement’, in Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Saku Pinta and David Berry (Eds), *Libertarian Socialism. Politics in Black and Red* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017), 232–250.

[72] Dreyfus-Armand and Cohn-Bendit, ‘Le Mouvement du 22 mars’, 124.

[73] Gombin, ‘The Ideology and Practice’, 422.

[74] Dreyfus-Armand and Cohn-Bendit, ‘Le Mouvement du 22 mars’, 124–129. The provos were a heterogeneous group of libertarian activists in Amsterdam in 1965–1967 who adopted a playful and provocative approach to protest and were

and specifically the Vietnam War.[21] A spiral of provocative direct actions and clumsy attempts at repression led to riots and hundreds of arrests. Subsequent demonstrations drew tens of thousands of university and lycée students, and the violent over-reaction of the police was recorded by the media and drew wide popular support for the protestors.

Support for the protestors was not forthcoming from the French Communist Party (PCF) or from the General Labour Confederation (CGT) it controlled, however. The PCF’s daily, *L’Humanité*, branded the students spoiled, middle-class provocateurs and dismissed the various Trotskyist, Maoist, anarchist and other organisations as *groupuscules* (a contraction of *groupes minuscules*). Another term was used by the PCF to describe the heterogeneous set of anarchist and unorthodox Marxist groups and organisations to the left of the Communists: *gauchiste*, or ‘leftist’, taken from Lenin’s 1920 pamphlet *“Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder*: ‘petty-bourgeois revolutionism, which smacks of anarchism, […] does not measure up to the conditions and requirements of a consistently proletarian class struggle’.[22]

The CFDT union (Democratic French Labour Confederation), on the other hand, backed the student movement. The CFDT had its roots in social Catholicism rather than Marxism but was nevertheless committed to class struggle (and was favoured by many anti-Stalinist revolutionary workers as a result) and was more open to more ‘qualitative’ demands on the part of workers. Even before 1968 it was strongly identified with the movement in favour of *au-*

[21] Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Le gauchisme, remède à la maladie infantile du communisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 31; translated as *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Edinburgh and Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2001).

[22] Vladimir Lenin, *“Left-Wing” Communism: an Infantile Disorder*, in *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964; [1920]), vol. 31, 17–118 (32).

togestion, self-management—'the most durable achievement of the revolution of May'.[23]

After demonstrations in towns across France and strikes in hundreds of lycées, the night of 10–11 May saw the first 'night of the barricades' in the Latin Quarter.[24] In advance of a national demonstration and one-day general strike called for 13 May, red flags appeared above the Sorbonne, and campus buildings and the Odéon theatre were occupied and became a centre for the student movement. In the occupied universities, general assemblies met each evening with thousands of participants discussing the events of the day and plans for the next. The demonstrations of 13 May were huge everywhere: nearly a million in Paris, tens of thousands in other towns.[25] Despite the strike call having been for just one day, some workers decided to stay out on strike, and even occupy their workplace: the first were workers at Sud-Aviation in Nantes, who occupied the plant and locked the director in his office. The strikes spread more or less spontaneously and turned into a tidal wave which had submerged the whole country by the end of May, affecting all regions and all industries, both public and private sectors. The Sud-Aviation strike even spread across the city to the extent that people began to talk of the 'Nantes Commune', with the town effectively being run for a fortnight by a General Strike Council.[26] 'Unlike the huge strikes of 1947, there were no orders from above,

[23] Daniel Guérin, letter to Pietro Ferrua, 5 July 1968, in FΔ721/32/4, Fonds Guérin, BDIC (Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre).

[24] See Eric Hazan, *A History of the Barricade* (London: Verso, 2015), 123–124.

[25] Antoine Prost, 'Quoi de neuf sur le Mai français?', *Le Mouvement social*, 143 (April–June 1988), 91–97.

[26] Richard Gombin, 'The Ideology and Practice of Contestation seen through Recent Events in France', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 5, no. 4 (October 1970), 410–429 (426). According to Maurice Joyeux, the Sud-Aviation union branch which launched the first occupation included every member of the Nantes FA group. Quoted in *1968: Le congrès de Carrare—Création de l'Internationale des Fédérations anarchistes* (Paris: Editions du Monde libertaire, 2015), 37.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit himself identified as an anarchist, but his attitude was similar to that defined by the UGAC (Union of Anarchist Communist Groups) in 1966: anarchists are only one part of a broad revolutionary movement; many Marxists now accept elements of the libertarian critique and are in favour of self-management; it is time to move beyond 'old quarrels inherited from the past', in particular that between Marx and Bakunin.[66] He was nevertheless 'very anti-Leninist' when it came to organisational methods: 'I am for organizational federalism—for federated autonomous groups which act together but still preserve their autonomy'.[67]

When an interviewer tried to pin him down with regard to intellectual influences on the revolutionary movement, Cohn-Bendit was dismissive:

> There aren't ten people in the movement who have read Marcuse. […] Camus is still a source, we read him, but he doesn't have the same influence now. […] Sartre belongs to the post-war period. We are at another stage. […] I'm not going to name a single anarchist thinker; I don't give a damn about theoreticians. There must be a theory which leads on to a particular activity. […] In practice one relies on Marx and Bakunin, on Marcuse today, or Kolakowski. It is a fundamental error in studying the French student movement to search for some thinker who inspires our activity. […] Every thinker counts for us.[68]

Compared to the heavily theorised critique of daily life produced by the Situationists, the 'global contestation' of the M22M

[66] UGAC, *Lettre au mouvement anarchiste international* (n.d. [1966]), quoted in Biard, *Histoire*, 162.

[67] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *Anarchism in the May Movement in France* (n.d.), translated by "N.W." from *Magazine littéraire* no.18 (June 1968), 10.

[68] Cohn-Bendit, *Anarchism in the May Movement*, 14–16.

without agreement on a "line" being a prerequisite for action'.[62] So the M22M was not really an 'organisation' but simply brought together revolutionary students who belonged to a number of organisations or none: members of the Nanterre Anarchist Group, who had split from the Anarchist Federation (FA), the Anarchist Students Liaison (LEA), Trotskyists from the JCR, Maoists from the UJC-ML, 'pro-Situationists', council Communists, left Catholics and many without an ideological label.[63] The M22M also had a very decentralised, federal organisational structure, but in practice it was very informal: a community of militants who met each other regularly and made decisions collectively at general meetings.[64] They refused to be integrated into the structures created in the occupied universities and 'wanted to exist only as an informal group, perpetually inventing forms of action':

> They remained, therefore, one of those 'agitating minorities' of which Sorel has spoken, which aimed at inspiring revolutionary movement without any theory. [...] Their actions were to be *exemplary*, that is, they were to have the character of political escalation designed to induce others to follow their example. [...] Direct action of this kind went further than any proposed by the syndicalists in that it was inspired by the example of guerrilla warfare and the tactics of systematic provocation.[65]

[62] Daniel Bensaïd and Henri Weber, *Mai 68: une répétition générale* (Paris: Maspero, 1968), 101.

[63] Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, 'Le Mouvement du 22 mars. Entretien avec Daniel Cohn-Bendit', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 11–13 (1988), special issue on 'Mai-68: Les mouvements étudiants en France et dans le monde', 124–129.

[64] Roland Biard, *Dictionnaire de l'extrême-gauche de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Belfond, 1978), 244–247.

[65] Gombin, 'The Ideology and Practice', 420–421.

no central strike committee; the movement spread from below'.[27] At the height of the general strike, it is now estimated that seven million workers were involved: the biggest strike in French history.

The strikes were however undermined by the tripartite Grenelle agreement (named after the location of the Ministry of Social Affairs) announced on 27 May, which included a 35% increase in the minimum wage, a 10% wage increase across industry and the legal right to union representation in the workplace. The more qualitative demands such as those mooted by the CFDT were ignored. On 5 June the CGT declared that the workers' demands had been met and they should return to work. Many workers were dissatisfied and the CGT Secretary General Georges Séguy was booed by Renault workers. The strikes and occupations continued.

The parties of the left did their best to take advantage of the situation. The PCF called for a 'government of the people'. Representatives of the *Parti socialiste unifié*, part of the pre-1968 'New Left'[28]) spoke at a mass rally organised by the UNEF (*Union nationale des étudiants français*, National Union of French Students) in the Charléty stadium on 27 May. Both the CGT and CFDT approved, with the former reiterating its call for a 'people's government' and the latter supporting the PSU's Pierre Mendès-France. The socialist François Mitterrand put himself forward as a presidential candidate. None of this came to anything, but the various Marxist groups were too small (and sectarian) to have any impact, and the more libertarian groups were focussed on the potentially insurrectionary role of the 'action committees'. On 30 May President de Gaulle made a broadcast in which he accused the Communist Party of plotting to take power, dissolved the National Assembly and called fresh elections, which a resurgent right won outright.

[27] Xavier Vigna, 'Beyond Tradition: The Strikes of May–June 1968' in Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne and James S. Williams (Eds), *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 47–57 (48).

[28] See Jacques Sauvageot (Ed), *Le PSU, des idées pour un socialisme au XXIe siècle?* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

Some strikes dragged on into late June and even July, but, undermined by Grenelle and lacking support from the CGT, most were ended by mid-June. The student movement gradually lost impetus too. Leftist organisations were banned on 12 June, the Odéon was cleared on the 14th and the Sorbonne on the 16th—thus putting an end to the 'Student Commune'.

The *comités d'action*

The rapid appearance and proliferation of 'action committees' has been seen as one of the most interesting and anarchistic aspects of 1968, seemingly fitting with the leftists' insistence on self-organisation, spontaneity and participation. For a while the occupation committees and action committees were 'authentic, autonomous organisations of the masses. It is in this phenomenon that the libertarian stamp on the movement is most evident'.[29] It is true that the various vanguardist organisations soon began to try and take over, their priority being to build their respective parties. As one anarchist put it: 'The *groupuscules* didn't understand what May was about. [...] They couldn't give up the classic organisational models. [...] It's in action that we have to find unity'.[30] Nevertheless:

> In contrast to this attitude, the great majority of the students rediscovered what is at the heart of the anarchist idea: self-organisation and self-administration, and the struggle against hierarchies. What's more the profoundly libertarian character of the movement became more pronounced in proportion as vanguardists attempted to take it over. The black flag very quickly

[29] Roland Biard, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste, 1945–1975* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1976), 180.

[30] Letter from Guy Daudet to Daniel Guérin, 25 November 1968, FΔ 721/29 bis, Fonds Guérin, BDIC.

ing successfully mobilised students against the Vietnam War, it was fragmented and in the years 1962–1968 became a site of competition between Communist, Trotskyist, Maoist, anarchist, PSU and other student organisations.[58] Anarchist and Situationist students at Strasbourg, Nantes and Nanterre created a *Tendance syndicale révolutionnaire fédéraliste* which succeeded in taking control of their respective associations.[59] It was the Situationists in the Strasbourg students' union who in 1966 published the notorious pamphlet, *On the Poverty of Student Life*, with its scandalous attack on the role of education in modern capitalist society, the conformism of the student body, sexual repression, the parlous state of the contemporary left and so on.

In May the M22M was at the centre of events: 'Its victories on the Nanterre campus and the militant fervour of its members made it the most active and popular of the groups'.[60] It was so named after the date on which 142 of its members occupied the university council chamber in protest against the arrest of five students from the National Vietnam Committee and the JCR following attacks on Chase Manhattan Bank and American Express buildings in Paris. Daniel Bensaïd would describe the M22M—the form of whose name was probably inspired by Castro's 'Movement of 26 July'—as anti-imperialist, anti-bureaucratic and anti-capitalist.[61] Its mixture of anarchist, Trotskyist and unaligned militants functioned 'at the cost of reciprocal concessions and on the basis of a common political experience which is the starting point of debate,

[58] The Trotskyist JCR, *Jeunesses communistes révolutionnaires*, and the Maoist *Union des jeunesses communistes (marxistes-léninistes)* were created in 1965/66 after being expelled from the PCF's student organisation, the UEC, *Union des jeunesses communistes*.

[59] See 'Programme de la Tendance syndicale révolutionnaire fédéraliste (TSRF)' in Liaison des Etudiants Anarchistes, *Anarchistes en 1968 à Nanterre* (Paris: Acratie, 1998), 35–40.

[60] Gombin, 'The Ideology and Practice', 420.

[61] Daniel Bensaïd, *Une lente impatience* (Paris: Stock, 2004), 80.

of the CGT in perennially downplaying the possibility of revolutionary change and insisting that demands had to be limited to the usual ones of 'pay, pensions, retirement'.[53] This had happened in 1936, 1947, 1958 and now 1968, and impatience with it was quite widespread among the striking workers of 1968. The conclusion formed by many was that this was either a result of the CGT's being overtaken by events, or because it had become 'caught up in the system'.[54]

'Leftism', the Student Movement and the *Mouvement du 22 Mars*

For Gombin, the interest in examining leftism lies in the fact that it presented itself as 'a successor to a theoretical construction which has practically monopolized radical thought over the last half-century', namely, Marxism-Leninism.[55] (Gombin acknowledges anarchism and syndicalism but points out that since the October Revolution they had survived only as sects, 'expending the best part of their energies in pursuing a fanatical critique of the Soviet Union and its supporters'.[56]) Leftism had found 'a sociological base in a living movement' and claimed to be 'the expression of current struggle', and thus 'no longer represents one radical utopia among others', but is 'the *theory* of a revolutionary movement in full flood'.[57]

One of the principal matrices of leftism was, of course, the student movement, and like the main political parties of the left, the main student organisation, the UNEF, was in crisis. Despite hav-

[53] A CGT member of 20 years' standing, quoted in Vigna, ibid., 55.

[54] Ibid., 56.

[55] Richard Gombin, *The Origins of Modern Leftism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 9.

[56] Ibid., 9–10.

[57] Ibid., 10.

> became the emblem not of the 'historic' anarchists, but of those who opposed the vanguardist presumptions of leaders who until then had had no followers and badly wanted some![31]

By the end of May, there were estimated to be over 400 university committees, neighbourhood committees and workplace committees all over France.[32] Their relative informality made it possible to maintain the flexibility necessary to respond to rapidly changing situations in a state of almost permanent mobilisation while providing some kind of organisational framework and co-ordination. Nor was participation predicated on acceptance of a particular ideology or programme. Indeed, as Gombin points out, this heterogeneity was an important aspect of the movement's originality:

> In the absence of a single revolutionary leadership, of a predominant ideological framework, ideas flowed freely, and everyone joined in the debate. […] Nine-tenths of the ideas expressed were put forward by people who belonged to no organization, by the anonymous crowds who were the true protagonists of the May revolt.[33]

The action committee form had precedents in the lycée students' action committees, and various Vietnam committees or, further afield, the *Aktionsgruppen* formed by the German SDS (Socialist German Students' League) following the killing of Benno Ohnesorg by police in June 1967.[34] Some of those involved in the

[31] Biard, *Histoire*, 180.

[32] Didier Fischer, *L'histoire des étudiants en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000); Patrick Combes, *La littérature et le mouvement de mai 68* (Paris: Seghers, 1984).

[33] Gombin, 'The Ideology and Practice', 412.

[34] Alain Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Journal de la Commune étudiante: Textes et documents novembre 1967–juin 1968* (Paris: Seuil, 1988 [1969]), 473.

1968 action committees, the Situationists notably, also pointed to historical precedents, starting with the Saint Petersburg Soviet of 1905: according to their 1966 pamphlet *On the Poverty of Student Life*, the revolutionary movement's ultimate aim must be 'the realisation on an international scale of the absolute power of the Workers' Councils, according to the model outlined in the experiences of the proletarian revolutions of this century'.[35] Councilism was also an important theme in Guérin's influential 1965 book, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, which sold in enormous numbers in May 1968.[36]

Despite their variety, the committees tended to adopt a number of principles and practices usually associated with anarchism: anti-authoritarianism and the rejection of hierarchies, direct democracy and the participation of all, binding and revocable mandates rather than representation and the rejection of bureaucracy, institutionalisation and vanguardism. A prefigurative approach to organising was a central concern. This seems not to have been because of a widespread awareness of anarchist doctrine, and the role of self-identifying anarchists was minimal. It was more the result of a generalised distrust of institutionalised politics and parties, and an unwillingness to reproduce the usual division of social roles or identities, both within the movement and in relation to 'the masses'.

The question of co-ordination or organisation was a matter for debate in the action committees from the very beginning. A Coordination Committee was set up at the Sorbonne on 5 May, the aim being to promote the creative spontaneity of the autonomous grassroots action committees while providing a minimum of co-ordination which would help sustain the mobilisation over the longer term—with the ultimate aim of bringing down the regime. In contrast, the M22M was adamant that any attempt to

[35] *De la misère en milieu étudiant*, 24.

[36] *L'Anarchisme, de la doctrine à la pratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965) translated as *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970). Guérin, letter to Ferrua.

demands for greater rights of trade union representation. Given the massive disruption to the normal workings of the capitalist economy, many workers were also obliged to organise things themselves collectively and in solidarity. Vigna emphasises that even in workplaces where there were occupations but no attempt at self-management, we should not minimise just how transgressive the occupations were:

> As a moment of contestation and denunciation of existing structures, and as an assertion of the right to be heard, 1968 profoundly shook the world of French labour relations and inaugurated a decade of labour 'insubordination'.[51]

Such working-class insubordination was fostered by the endless meetings and discussions which took place as a result of the strikes and occupations, in a comparable way to the more famous debates in the occupied universities and the Odéon theatre. These meetings enabled the drafting of lists of demands, in which criticisms of Fordist rationalisation featured prominently, despite union officials' efforts to channel the demands towards more 'traditional' areas.[52]

When the strike movement began to decline in June, workers also began to give voice to criticisms of the unions, for a number of reasons. Many strikers did not feel that their union's demands addressed questions of power relations in the workplace properly, and in some places grassroots committees were created to formulate demands concerning the organisation of work. Secondly, it was by no means only leftist revolutionaries who questioned the role

[51] Vigna, 'Beyond Tradition', 52.

[52] Vigna, ibid., 54. On this issue, see Ken Coates, 'Democracy and Workers' Control', first published in Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn (Eds), *Towards Socialism* (London: Fontana, 1965); republished in Ken Coates, *Workers' Control: Another World Is Possible. Arguments from the Institute for Workers' Control* (Nottingham: Spokesman for Socialist Renewal, 2003), 33–55.

In May–June, it seems to be the case that the militancy of many workers derived from 'a reaction against all forms of domination: that of the workplace, with all its constraints, that of the company on life outside the factory, that of the state, through its troops of police at the service of the employer'.[46]

It is noteworthy how quickly *autogestion* (self-management) became the buzzword of 1968, to the extent that the national leadership of the big union confederations was effectively obliged to address it.[47] The CFDT declared its support on 25 May, but the PCF and CGT, as we have seen, actively opposed it: Séguy declared in the pages of *L'Humanité* on 22 May that 'self-management is an empty phrase'.

Worker self-management had been a major theme of New Left discourse for the previous decade, with the journal *Autogestion* being founded in 1965 by Proudhon specialist Georges Gurvitch (following a conference on the contemporary relevance of Proudhon the previous year[48]). But the idea was by no means limited to intellectual circles: the idea had been raised as early as 1963, for instance, by the CFDT's Clothing, Leather and Textile Workers' Federation.[49] As soon as the occupations began in mid-May, the CFDT proposed the replacement of 'administrative and industrial monarchy' with democratic structures based on self-management.[50] It is true that most attempts at worker self-management were relatively limited, but it is also the case that there were often demands for greater worker participation in various aspects of management and

[46] Hatzfeld, ibid., 52.

[47] Groupe Noir et Rouge, *Autogestion, Etat, Révolution* (Paris: Editions du Cercle/Editions de la Tête de Feuilles, 1972), 9.

[48] The proceedings were published as *L'Actualité de Proudhon* (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1967).

[49] Alexis Bonnet, 'L'autogestion et les cédétistes lyonnais', in Dreyfus-Armand, Frank, Lévy and Zancarini-Fournel (Eds), *Les années 68*, pp. 363–378 (363).

[50] CFDT, 'Positions et action de la CFDT au cours des événements de mai-juin 1968', in *Syndicalisme* no.1266 A (November 1969), 54.

structure the movement 'from above' would inevitably lead to bureaucratisation and hierarchies. They put their faith entirely in the 'creative spontaneity' of the grassroots, even during a downswing in the mobilisation. The action committees continued to proliferate in June, but they were unable to counter either the determination of the parties of the left to look to an institutional outcome through elections, or the willingness of the trade unions to settle, or the hardening of the government's stance in mid-June.

One of the main themes developed by the movement was the liberation of the creativity of all, both as an end and as a means. Some formulation or other of it became ubiquitous. It was conceived as a revolutionary means to combat alienation and the division of labour which define social roles and identities—1968, as Ross argues, was about 'the flight from social determinations', 'a shattering of social identity'.[37] Or in Dutschke's words, 'We do not allow ourselves to be made into functions any longer!'[38] Such a critique politicised many questions previously excluded from public deliberation. It was about removing barriers and about liberating the creative powers of those normally repressed by the 'bourgeois cultural system'. This implied an attack on the patriarchal, sexually repressive bourgeois family, on bourgeois education and the attitudes and values it inculcates. It was also directed against bureaucracy, productivism and consumerism. According to the 'Freud—Che Guevara Action Committee' the objective was a socialist system which would destroy the barriers which prevented the free creativity of all.[39]

An important novelty here was the shift in perspective from what the journal *Arguments* a few years earlier had called the 'macro-social level' to the 'micro-social': the idea, discernible in

[37] Ross, *May 68*, 2 and 3.

[38] Rudi Dutschke, *The Students and the Revolution* (Spokesman Pamphlet, no. 15, 1971), 8. Translated by Patricia Howard from a speech given in Uppsala, 7 March 1968.

[39] Gobille, *Mai*, 33.

Fourier and later in anarcho-syndicalism, that 'the construction of a socialist society must be carried out at the level of the small, basic units of society'.[40] More recently, theorists such as Henri Lefebvre had begun to put the emphasis on everyday life:

> In this sense one could say that society has not been revolutionised if, when the structures of ownership or the state system are transformed, human and inter-human relations remain what they were before.[41]

Or as the Situationist Vaneigem, an admirer of Lefebvre, put it in 1967:

> People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints—such people have a corpse in their mouth.[42]

General Strike: Spontaneity, Occupations and Self-Management

Vigna argues that historians must 'challenge the superficial idea that it was among young student rebels that one finds the inventiveness and verve of 68 while the workers were stuck in the

[40] Edgar Morin and Georges Lapassade, 'La question 'micro-sociale'', *Arguments*, 25–26 (1er trimestre 1962), 2–4 (2).

[41] Morin and Lapassade, ibid. Lefebvre was professor of sociology at Nanterre. See *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), translated by Sacha Rabinovitch as *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[42] Raoul Vaneigem, *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith as *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Books, 2006), 26.

rut of traditional material demands'.[43] Indeed, from an anarchist viewpoint, certain aspects of the 1968 strikes seem particularly interesting:

> [T]he radical contestation of all aspects of power within the factory, the attempts at self-organization, even self-management, criticism of the very role of the unions, the unleashing of conflicts in whole sectors, are the distinctive signs of a mode of action which may well be described as libertarian.[44]

In some respects—the organisation of some strikes by the unions, the more quantitative nature of their demands and the fact that the strikers were ready to negotiate—the 1968 strikes were rather traditional, but in other respects they were novel and radical. They were, to begin with, very strongly supported by an unprecedentedly large proportion of workers and across an unusually broad range of industries. They were also unusual in that they often involved links with other movements and therefore other demands. In part this was a function of changes in the nature of the working class since the mid-1950s which had tended to undermine the order and discipline both of the factory and of the union: worker-peasants, immigrant workers, women, young workers often from other regions and semi-skilled workers.[45] Less integrated into either trade union culture or the firm, it was often such workers who from the early 1960s adopted unconventional forms of struggle; in 1968 they were also often the least willing to accept the authority of the union and were more open to the radicalisation sought by revolutionaries in the unions.

[43] Vigna, 'Beyond Tradition', 47.

[44] Gombin, 'The Ideology and Practice', 428.

[45] Nicolas Hatzfeld, 'Peugeot-Sochaux: de l'entreprise dans la crise à la crise dans l'entreprise' in René Mouriaux, Annick Percheron, Antoine Prost and Danièle Tartakowsky (Eds), *1968—Exploration du Mai français* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), vol. 1, 51–72 (63).