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Disorder, *les forces de l'ordre* and the re-ordering of capitalism in May-June 1968.

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Abstract

The uprising of May-June 1968 in France is known for its intense street battles between demonstrators and police. But, despite the intensity of the clashes and the thousands of injuries sustained, it is also known for the relatively small number of deaths; this is perhaps particularly surprising given France's history of ferocious and lethal state repression in moments of protest and revolution. An examination of the ways in which those deploying the police reacted to profound social and political crisis reveals much about how different individuals and factions conceived of the nature of the status quo in 1968, and their views on whether the established order could be allowed to adapt without threatening its very existence. This was, in short, a struggle between many actors over what constituted order and what constituted disorder. Discussion of the role of Prefect of Police for the Paris region, Maurice Grimaud, is crucial, but it is also important to look at the part played by the Communist Party and the trade unions and the way the various players approached the process of change and, arguably, the process of 'modernisation'.

Résumé

Le soulèvement de mai-juin 1968 en France est connu pour ses batailles intenses entre manifestants et policiers. Mais, malgré l'intensité de ces affrontements et les blessures reçues par les manifestants et les policiers, les événements sont connus aussi pour le fait qu'il y a peu de morts; ceci est peut-être particulièrement surprenant étant donné l'histoire plus générale d'une répression de l'état français souvent mortelle, surtout aux moments de protestation et de révolution. Une exploration des manières par lesquelles ceux qui dirigeaient les actions policières ont réagi à cette crise sociale et politique révèle beaucoup en ce qui concerne la façon dont ils concevaient le caractère de l'ordre établi en 1968, et leurs points de vue sur une possible mutation du statu quo. Bref, c'était une lutte entre beaucoup d'acteurs différents sur le caractère de l'ordre et le désordre. Une discussion du rôle du Préfet de Police pour la région parisienne, Maurice Grimaud, est cruciale, mais il est aussi important d'examiner les rôles joués par le Parti communiste et les syndicats, et la façon dont les divers acteurs ont abordé la question de la mutation de la société, voire sa 'modernisation'.

In the eyes of staunch supporters of the status quo, the events of May-June 1968 were a profound and lengthy disorder; some major and countless minor aspects of normal life were profoundly and perniciously disrupted by strikes, occupations of places of work and ceaseless demonstrations, leading to problems with transport, communications and availability of consumer items, not to mention creeping governmental paralysis and increasing likelihood of regime change. For the many millions of insurgent workers and students, meanwhile, the events were not only about pay, conditions of work or everyday life at university, or even the nature of politics under de Gaulle; protestors were also beginning to explore the potential for a very different way of organising work, study and society more generally, a way as yet

only faintly sketched in their minds and in their militant actions, but certainly of a far more egalitarian and democratic nature than anything they had experienced hitherto. When examining the ways in which the ‘forces de l’ordre’ were deployed in May-June 1968, then, we should study not only the detail of repression in response to revolt, of attacks, injuries and weapons on either side of street barricades and in occupied places of work, but also the way in which politicians and top civil servants who were principal defenders of and major beneficiaries from the established order sought to defend and/or adapt it so as to ensure that it remained largely intact. In the overview of the role of the police in May 1968 that follows, I examine the ways in which those deploying the police reacted to profound social and political crisis and how individuals and factions disagreed amongst themselves as to the most effective way to defend the status quo; or whilst acknowledging that full defence of the status quo was not possible, how they disagreed as to the way in which the established order should be adapted in order to allow it to evolve without threatening its very existence. This was, in short, a struggle between many actors over what constituted order and what constituted disorder, and over how to establish durable and desirable conditions of calm.

In the voluminous literature on May-June 1968, we are often reminded how, despite the numerous and lengthy clashes between protesters and police, there were relatively few deaths in combat - probably seven - during these two months (Joffrin 1988: 303-5; Le Goff 1998: 95-7; Rajsfus 1998: 18). If this figure is accurate, there were two fewer deaths in May-June 1968 than in the single police charge at the Paris metro station Charonne on 8 February 1962, and very substantially fewer than on the night of 17-18 October 1961, when at least one hundred unarmed Algerians were killed by the Parisian police. In 1968 there was no mass and vengeful killing of rebels as there had been during the suppression of various previous revolts in France, and notably the Paris Commune of 1871, no large-scale deportations (although there were several hundred (Gordon 2003)), and on the part of the insurgents no use of guns nor killing of high-profile representatives of the state. These facts regarding the relatively low level of violence are indeed significant, but it should also be pointed out from the start that, in addition to seven deaths, there were thousands of injuries in clashes between police and protesters, many of them life-changing, and it was for this reason that violence became one of the notable and determining features of the uprising.

Some of the literature on May-June 1968 also reminds us of the role of the Prefect of Police for the Paris region, Maurice Grimaud, who according to various accounts (including his own) played a major role in avoiding a bloodbath. Discussion of Grimaud’s role is indeed crucial, but it is also important to look at the part played by the PCF and the trade unions in the various players’ practical exploration in those months of the nature of order and the nature of disorder.

Revolt, repression and policing dilemmas

The main developments regarding the encounters between police and protesters between early May and mid-June can be presented in three parts (Hatzfeld 2008; *Le Monde*, May and June 1968, *passim*; Jobard 2008; Mathieu 2008; Zancarini-Fournel 2008). First, inflammatory responses to the actions of an already well-supported student movement caused it to grow quickly. On 3 May, the Rector of the University of Paris, Jean Roche, called on the police to evacuate the Sorbonne during intense protests and conflict between the left and the extreme right Occident group, political activity which had in part transferred from Nanterre; this was famously the first time

the police had intervened in the Sorbonne for hundreds of years, and approximately 400 students were taken away in police vans to have their papers checked, amidst chants of ‘libérez nos camarades’, ‘Halte à la répression’ and ‘CRS-SS’. Large crowds of students and other protestors gathered in order to express their support for the arrested students, and the determination on the part of the university authorities and the government to win back the Latin Quarter that night led to pitched battles between police and demonstrators, with large numbers of injuries on both sides and many further arrests.

The heavy-handed way in which the police were used against student protestors in early May continued to strengthen their determination to physically fight the police and drew many others into the confrontation, and the police in turn responded with increased violence. Cobble stones used as projectiles from behind barricades and Molotov cocktails thrown at groups of police waiting to intervene were met with tear gas -- sometimes fired horizontally at demonstrators instead of at 45 degrees, as directed in regulations, and occasionally fired into apartments where supporters had gathered -- ferocious baton charges, beatings on the ground, and beatings after arrest in vans or police stations. In some cases non-participant passers-by were attacked and injured by the police.

There was nation-wide outrage at the behaviour of the police in early May, not only amongst students and university lecturers, but also on the part of journalists and the public more generally at what was seen as grossly disproportionate violence. Newspapers, television and radio covered the clashes in detail, carrying photographs, footage and detailed accounts of young, unarmed and unprotected demonstrators attacked and injured, some victims bloodied and carried away on stretchers, non-partisan passers-by attacked by police simply because they were on the street near protestors, and ferocious charges by police amid clouds of tear gas, upturned cars and barricades made of cobble stones and street furniture. Support groups were established for students who were ‘frappés par la répression’, universities across the country were occupied in solidarity with their comrades in Paris and demonstrations showing solidarity were held in dozens of towns and cities, with participation well beyond the student movement. The editor of *Le Monde*, Jacques Fauvet, offered a prescient warning on 11 May: ‘[u]n régime qui ne contrôle pas sa police est, un jour ou l’autre, exposé à en être victime’.

Although not all days and nights were of the same intensity, these violent exchanges largely set the tone for relations between protestors and police for the next five to six weeks, with three nights of particularly violent exchanges (‘les nuits des barricades’) on 10 May, 24 May and 11 June. The actions of the police thus played a crucial role in raising the stakes of the conflict, transforming it from one mainly concerned with a series of issues in higher education to a widespread revolt, increasingly promoting a critique of the socio-political and economic status quo, with the object of protest not only the university system and the Ministry of Education, but the Gaullist state more generally, and indeed for an increasing number of people, the overall social and political system. De Gaulle himself suggested on 24 May that the country was ‘au bord de la paralysie’ (de Gaulle 1968A), but for many the disorder on the streets and the movement it represented was more legitimate than the ‘order’ represented by de Gaulle and his government, not to mention the state broadcasting system, the ORTF, which was widely seen as a mere mouthpiece of the strong state. Heavy-handed policing and the refusal to hold proper negotiations with student leaders was the reaction of a regime increasingly out of touch with society at large,

and which underestimated the level of malaise not only amongst students but well beyond the student movement as well.

In early May, the protests spread both geographically and sociologically, and many millions of workers from all over France as well as students from most university towns were involved (Delale and Ragache 1978; Reynolds 2011: 100-122.) There was, for example, a particularly well-supported 24-hour cross-sector strike and day of action in the West of France on 8 May, with demonstrations involving blue-collar workers, peasant farmers, university students and school students, and this eagerness to strike and protest was increasingly the pattern elsewhere, with movements on 10 May in the Loire and on 11 May in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Lorraine regions. But the real turning point came with the 24-hour, nation-wide strike on 13 May with demonstrations in over 450 towns and cities, including a huge and peaceful march in Paris with substantial participation by workers from both public and private sectors, as well as by university students and lecturers, and school students. Organised by the CGT trade union confederation, with the support of UNEF, the CFDT, Force Ouvrière and the FEN, it was held explicitly in order to present a united front against police repression, the banner at the front of the march reading simply: 'Étudiants, enseignants, travailleurs, solidaires'. That evening, the Sorbonne was taken back by occupying students and the nation-wide wave of strikes and workplace occupations began in earnest, with impetus for the movement provided by the rank and file, and a complete absence of national coordination. (Vigna 2007: 26; Vigna 2011: 48)

Thus the violent exchanges between police and students triggered worker protests which between 20 and 30 May affected the entire country and became the largest and longest general strike in French history. Countless places of work in both private and public sectors were affected and as time went by strikers were increasingly militant in their demands, aspirations and actions, with some particularly truculent bosses 'sequestered' in their offices and at other plants worker records were destroyed, and furniture burned (Vigna 2007: 38-9).

The third stage of this narrative, which runs from the last week of May to roughly mid-June, is more complex and is the period when both the government and the leaders of the CGT trade union confederation, in particular, were attempting to, respectively, coerce and persuade workers to return to work. On the one hand, the government, employers and trade union confederations held intensive negotiations at the Ministère des Affaires Sociales at the rue de Grenelle in Paris on 25-27 May, chaired by Prime Minister Pompidou himself; the result is usually referred to as the 'constat de Grenelle', because the jointly-agreed document which emerged from the tri-partite talks - offering a 35 per cent increase in the minimum wage, recognition of trade-union sections in places of work but little reduction in working time and only a small increase in wages overall, with no changes to the structure of authority in the workplace - was, to the frustration of union leaders, rejected overwhelmingly by rank and file members. On 29 May, de Gaulle flew secretly to Baden Baden to consult with General Massu, Commander of the French army in Germany. This was a meeting that has been interpreted in various ways, but the most likely explanation would seem to be that the two Generals met – and as soon as de Gaulle was back in Paris they were known publically to have met - in order for de Gaulle to ensure that Massu and the armed forces more generally were prepared to offer continued support to the regime (Joffrin 1988: 266-91). On 30 May, after his return to Paris, the President announced the dissolution of parliament, alongside threats of military intervention and rule by decree if the country did not return to work (de Gaulle 1968B); as this came in the

immediate wake of de Gaulle's meeting with Massu, the stakes were raised considerably. Combined with a large (several hundreds of thousands-strong), pro-Gaullist demonstration on the Champs Élysées the same day, followed by similar marches the following day in provincial towns and cities, this marked the beginning of the return of governmental confidence (Georgi 1995). As has been so often the case in French history, rebellion on the streets was followed by counter-revolution, or at least counter-offensive, also on the streets, but this time it was accompanied by complicity between union leaders, the government and employer representatives regarding a return to work, despite huge numbers of workers wishing to continue with strikes and occupations.

This was also the moment when de Gaulle replaced various more liberal ministers, including the Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet with Raymond Marcellin. The reshuffle was clearly intended to lead to a more repressive approach towards law and order and the decidedly hawkish new Interior minister, quickly dubbed 'Raymond la matraque', had a clear idea of what had – or in his view what had not – happened regarding policing in May and that weak leadership and non-existent strategy were to blame:

'[A] aucun niveau, il n'a existé, durant ces trente jours, de conception globale, réfléchie et bien calculée, du maintien de l'ordre' (Marcellin 1978: 10).

Marcellin had a preoccupation bordering on obsession with the role of far left groups in the events of May and was convinced that they, controlled internationally, were the driving force behind the disorder, whilst the police heroically took the brunt of unprovoked attacks. He expresses these two, to say the least simplistic, views of the police-student clashes as follows:

'La police, avec sang froid et en subissant de dures épreuves, reste a chaque fois maîtresse du terrain, mais les groupes révolutionnaires animent et relancent l'action après chaque accalmie et le conflit rebondit sans cesse' (Marcellin 1978: 10).

Once Marcellin was in post, he swiftly evacuated occupied public buildings, most importantly the Sorbonne and the Odéon theatre in Paris, banned most demonstrations, and outlawed many far left groups, as well as the extreme right Occident. He oversaw the gathering of extensive information on all manner of individuals via surveillance – which offered a 'moisson fructueuse de fichiers de militants, de listes d'adresses, immédiatement exploitée' (Marcellin 1978: 18) -- and expelled those foreign nationals who were deemed politically suspect. He later implemented a reform of the police, which included increasing their number by roughly 20 per cent. Chapter Two of his book, in a direct and snubbing reference to Grimaud's book, is entitled 'En juin, ne fais pas ce qui te plaît'. It is perhaps surprising that the Paris Prefect was not himself replaced at the end of May, and according to Grimaud's own account removing him was seriously considered (296). But it would seem that even de Gaulle grudgingly recognised that there was a certain logic behind Grimaud's approach to policing, even if Marcellin did not.

It is reasonable to infer that this new climate, formed of de Gaulle's visit to Massu, his bullish and successful speech on 30 May, the pro-Gaullist marches in the following 24 hours, the arrival of Marcellin at the Ministry of the Interior, and complicity between government, employers and trade union leaders at the rue de Grenelle talks resulting in a joint position which called for a return to work,

contributed decisively to the sustained violence with which the police attempted to take back the Renault Flins and the Peugeot Sochaux factories in the first two weeks of June. This resulted in the deaths of three protestors. At both Flins, in the Île de France region, and Sochaux, in the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté region, workers were – like so many others nation-wide - refusing to end their strikes and occupations despite the recommendations emerging from the Grenelle negotiations. Workers from both plants were playing a particularly important role not only in their local movements but also nationally, organising marches, debates, meetings and leafleting campaigns to disseminate information and call for support. (Hatzfeld 1992; Talbo 1968)

On 6 June the police assault on the Flins factory, which had been occupied since 16 May, triggered four days of violent confrontations in the fields and the housing estates of the surrounding area; on 10 June, Gilles Tautin, aged 17, a Parisian school student and member of the Maoist Union des jeunes communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJCML), drowned in the river Seine whilst attempting to escape a police charge. Sochaux had been occupied since 20 May and its workers had likewise been playing an important role locally and nationally. On 11 June a huge police intervention in the factory quickly attracted large numbers of local supporters, particularly after accounts had spread of acute police violence. That morning, 24-year-old factory worker Pierre Beylot was killed when a policeman opened fire, and later that day 49-year-old factory worker Henri Blanchet was killed falling from a wall after a police grenade exploded near him. The police assault at Sochaux drew such a large and energetic crowd of supporters from the region that, with no sign of the battles ending and on orders from Paris, the police withdrew completely at the end of the afternoon after what had no doubt been a grave tactical error on the government's part. At both Renault and Sochaux, far from the strike movement ending after these dramatic and tragic events, it gained renewed vigour.

The considerable violence which characterised the confrontations at Flins and Sochaux was entirely in keeping with the President's and his ministers' attitudes towards the strikes and other protests. De Gaulle and the government were by now desperate to ensure that striking workers returned to work and took the approach that they must do that or face the repressive consequences, as the President had made entirely clear in his speech on 30 May. The government and employers felt they had made significant concessions at the Grenelle talks and believed that the PCF and the CGT in particular should and would get the millions of striking workers back to work, and indeed the CGT national office declared on 5 June that 'partout où les revendications essentielles ont été satisfaites, l'intérêt des salariés est de se prononcer en masse pour la reprise du travail dans l'unité' (in Vigna 2007: 36). Whereas striking and demonstrating students posed no immediate threat to the functioning of the economy or the established order more generally, the millions of striking workers of course did, and the strikes were receiving a great deal of media attention world-wide. The Minister of the Interior Christian Fouchet had sent a directive to all Prefects on 30 May, ordering them to end strikes and occupations and offering extra resources for that purpose:

'[V]ous avez pour devoir immédiat d'éliminer toute obstruction à la liberté du travail et réduire l'occupation des installations [sic] administratives prioritaires... Vous déterminerez les entreprises où cette reprise est la plus urgente et la plus facile et serait la plus spectaculaire et la plus féconde stop Je suis prêt pour les opérations particulières que vous me proposerez à mettre à votre disposition des moyens

matériels supplémentaires' (in Vigna 2007: 34). The 'opérations particulières' were of course mainly police operations.

Behind the visible facts and consequences of confrontation, injury and death, there was considerable disagreement amongst those directly or indirectly responsible for policing with regard to the best strategy to adopt towards demonstrators, especially towards students, with whom many of the most highly-publicised clashes took place. The nature of these disagreements, between de Gaulle, Grimaud, Marcellin and to some extent Pompidou, is revealed in some detail in memoirs written by Grimaud and Marcellin. (Also see *Politique Autrement* 1999, Lachaise and Tricaud 2009, Bernard 2010:137, Nivet 2015.) From early May, de Gaulle's impulse was very much to go on the offensive against student demonstrators, urging that the police should be incited to greater violence: 'il faut leur donner la gnole', he insisted (Grimaud 1978: 210). According to Grimaud, de Gaulle also wanted at an early stage to ban certain demonstrations, to have recourse to the army and to evacuate the occupied Odéon theatre in the Latin Quarter at an early stage. The prefect of police, by contrast, believed that these measures would lead to far more bloodshed and an escalation of the situation and on the whole put into practice a less repressive approach, meaning: deployment of large numbers of personnel in order to avoid the risk of police being overpowered by demonstrators, which would have increased the likelihood of the use of firearms; constant visits to and meetings with police on the street at all levels; medical teams in police stations in order to deter brutality against protesters who had been detained; frequent contact with police trade union representatives; attempts to combat the more hard-right influences on policemen, which tended to encourage brutality; moves to secure pay rises for police officers; constant contact with government ministers regarding the protests; and frequent contacts with the organisers of demonstrations (Nivet 2015: paras 1-20; Grimaud 1978: 251-80).

Grimaud, who comments that when the infamous Maurice Papon had been Prefect of Police for the Paris region from 1958 to 1967, 'la police parisienne avait été constamment incitée à réagir vite et fort aux menaces à l'ordre public' (in Nivet 2015: para. 5), even wrote to all police officers in the Paris region on 29 May - without previously communicating the content of the letter to the Minister of the Interior or any other minister, still less the President of the Republic - insisting that force used against protesters should be sufficient to prevent demonstrators from having free reign to do as they wished, but not excessively violent and certainly not vengeful, however trying the process of attempting to keep control was. In particular, the practice of hitting demonstrators on the ground or beating them after arrest must on no account continue, he wrote:

'Frapper un manifestant tombé à terre, c'est se frapper soi-même en apparaissant sous un jour qui atteint toute la fonction policière. Il est encore plus grave de frapper des manifestants après arrestation et lorsqu'ils sont conduits dans des locaux de police pour y être interrogés' (342).

Beyond the undoubted humanitarian and perhaps also personal dimension to Grimaud's letter (he later revealed that his own children were participants in the revolt) there was on his part a keen understanding of the dynamic of the situation and a shrewd tactician at work, who was keenly aware of the possibility of the revolt escalating still further. In his letter he states this clearly: 'toutes les fois qu'une violence illégitime est commise contre un manifestant, ce sont des dizaines de ses camarades qui souhaitent le venger. Cette escalade n'a pas de limites.' (342). This applied as much to violence against workers as to violence against students, as events

at Flins and Sochaux showed, but the hawkish elements in government chose to take a very different path.

This was, then, a ‘modernising’, ‘soft’ as opposed to ‘hard’ approach to policing, reflecting a view that protestors had legitimate concerns and that as well as negotiations, social change should take place in order to avoid even more serious revolt. According to his own account, Grimaud (1978: 325) told de Gaulle that most protesting students were expressing a profound desire for long-overdue reform, not for the wholesale destruction of the established order:

‘Les jeunes ont secoué un édifice dans lequel ils refusent de vivre et une société qui ne leur offre rien de généreux. Derrière leurs excès, leur violence, leur rage de détruire, il y a, j’en suis persuadé, un profond appel à une mutation fondamentale de notre société.’

Pompidou, meanwhile, took a position somewhere between that of Grimaud on the one hand and that of de Gaulle and Marcellin on the other. On his return from a visit to Iran on 11 May, the Prime Minister announced the reopening of the Sorbonne and the freeing of the arrested students and on the whole he and Grimaud saw eye-to-eye. Édouard Balladur, at the time an advisor to Pompidou, commented on these relations many years later as follows:

‘En mai 68, Pompidou jouait sur le temps, pour attendre le retournement de l’opinion, qui, longtemps, fut favorable aux manifestants, tandis que de Gaulle réclamait des mesures de force afin que l’ordre fût rapidement rétabli. Ils étaient en désaccord sur la tactique à suivre’ (*L’Express* 2008).

Disorder and the re-ordering of capitalism

Beyond the immediate disagreements between individual politicians and civil servants regarding policing in May-June 1968, the dilemmas discussed above reflect significant differences in approach towards the way in which society should be managed and how the French should be governed. It has been suggested by various authors writing about the historical significance of 1968 in France that, whilst the French economy had in various ways undergone significant modernisation and the country was in many ways a typically prosperous, advanced capitalist country, the Gaullist regime was politically an authoritarian relic of an earlier period, a legacy from when the threat of civil war over the Algerian struggle for independence had brought the highly authoritarian de Gaulle back to power (e.g. Debray 1978; Mouriaux and Capdevieille 1988; also Le Goff 2014).

The trajectory of the authoritarian-populist head of state and his entourage had of course been characterised by armed conflict and political antagonism, which meant that by the end of the 1960s his position was more fragile than at the beginning of the decade, and this fragility became far more apparent by the end of June 1968, in spite of the landslide victory for the Gaullists in the parliamentary elections. The leader of this regime, which was stamped with the marks of emergency and transience, had first become head of state in August 1944 after the Nazis had fled Paris, de Gaulle confidently insisting that the Republic had not ceased to exist during the Occupation and at the same time deeply fearful of Communist takeover. Twelve years after defeat in a referendum over the nature of the constitution of the Fourth Republic in 1946, he returned to power in a quasi-coup d’état in May 1958 with the full backing of the French army. Once his intentions with regard to Algerian independence became clear, the pro-French Algeria Organisation de l’Armée secrète declared war on him, leading to several attempts on his life and an abortive coup d’état in April 1961. Certainly, de

Gaullé held regular national and local elections and under his presidency parliament played a fairly full role, but in various referenda campaigns he repeated threats to withdraw and leave the country in chaos if the result went against him. His approach to trade unions and even political parties, meanwhile, was one of haughty dismissal. Thus, in what was still in numerous ways a far more authoritarian form and style of government than that in many other industrialised nations, and one which still bore distinct signs of impermanence and fragility, violence was never far from de Gaulle's words and actions.

In May-June 1968, what the President said and how he behaved indeed continued to show how de Gaulle the soldier was to the fore. After returning from a truncated visit to Romania, he declared on 18 May, via Prime Minister Pompidou, that his approach towards the protesters was '[L]a réforme oui, la chienlit non', implying in characteristically Bonapartist fashion that he represented order whilst those who opposed him offered only disorder. By the time of his speech of 24 May, which was widely ridiculed, he had apparently re-thought the situation somewhat, even suggesting that France was perhaps old-fashioned and recognising the need for a 'mutation de notre société... il y a à réformer'. Announcing a plebiscite-referendum on change in both higher education and the economy, he made it clear, however, that a No vote would result in his immediate departure, suggesting that there would be further chaos if this happened. (de Gaulle 1968A)

In his speech on 30 May, de Gaulle announced that parliamentary elections would be held in June, strictly conditional on strikers returning to work; if the strikes continued, 'd'autres voies que le scrutin immédiat du pays' would be pursued, presumably meaning suspension of parliament and direct rule by Presidential decree under the terms of Article 16 of the constitution, a path he had taken during five months in 1961 after the attempted coup d'état. This would no doubt have been accompanied by the use of the army to 'rétablir l'ordre', as he put it in his speech, and by this point there had already been significant movement of troops, in particular in the direction of Paris (e.g. Rajsfus 1998: 18). In any case, he insisted, 'l'action civique' was an immediate necessity, and from this moment the networks of 'le gaullisme d'ordre', including the shady and thuggish *Service d'action civique* militia, were greatly reinforced. François Audigier (2012: para 6) describes this process as a 'système de vigilance et d'action qui doublait *de facto* le système officiel de surveillance et de répression mis en place par le ministre de l'Intérieur Raymond Marcellin'. In de Gaulle's combative and threatening speech, in harmony with his new Minister of the Interior, he identified clearly the perceived enemy: international communism. (de Gaulle. 1968B)

By contrast with de Gaulle and Marcellin's blunt class-against-class approach to law and order, Grimaud's attitude, and to some extent Pompidou's as well, anticipated the more consensual approach towards politics and labour relations which were characteristic of a later era, beginning (albeit very slowly) under President Pompidou himself from 1969, continuing under Giscard d'Estaing between 1974 and 1981 and perhaps reaching its apogee under Mitterrand in the 1980s, when *alternance* and *cohabitation* in the governmental sphere were combined with more consensual industrial relations, all of which was enabled by the decline of the PCF and by the PS moving rapidly to the centre (Hewlett 1998: 60-91). The approach and results of the Grenelle negotiations have indeed been described as 'Fordist', meaning tripartite negotiations and concessions on all sides, less radical trade union behaviour in return for a more conciliatory employer body and a greater share of the profits for workers. Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (2000) even suggests that the Grenelle talks constituted

joint management (*cogestion*) of the May-June crisis by government, employers and trade union leaders. Grimaud's approach to policing might itself be described as Fordist, where the adversary is granted a certain degree of legitimacy in the interests of at least a partial compromise instead of regarded as a force simply to be combatted and if possible roundly defeated, in other words treated simply as the enemy, which is a risky strategy in any situation where the opponent is both powerful and determined.

But it should also be noted that there was another dimension to Grimaud's more cautious approach to the policing of students. Students were predominantly white, often middle-class, and certainly (at least some of them) future members of the ruling elite and destined to hold important positions in the running of society and politics. Indeed, various student leaders went on to become mainstream politicians, including Cohn-Bendit and Henri Weber, who both became MEPs, and Brice Lalonde who was French environment minister in the early 1990s. Many others had roles in the construction of the Parti socialiste during the 1970s, for example, and countless other participants of course went on to have jobs in the professions and in management in both private and public sectors. Any violent deaths at the hands of the police of such future members of the social and political elite, often themselves from the same milieu, was to be avoided at all costs (Grimaud 1978: 297). Workers, by contrast, who are incidentally almost absent from Grimaud's account, had often been attacked in the past by police when on strike or in the street – since 1945 most notably in the strikes of 1947, of 1948, in the 'anti-Ridgeway' demonstration of 1952, on 17-18 October 1961 and in 1962 at Charonne metro station - and their perceived duty to toe the line in terms of organisation and labour power behind production was clear. Put more bluntly, the lives of white, indigenous French (*français de souche*) workers were more valuable than those of immigrant (especially Algerian) workers, but less valuable than those of mainly white, mainly French and often middle class students. There was thus being played out, not simply a clash of views between individuals as to the best way to restore order on the streets and in places of work, but also fundamental disagreements as to the way in which to restore order to, and beyond that to re-order capitalism in the face of profound and ongoing protest. What was the most effective way of providing a framework within which capitalist enterprise could operate? Recourse to autocratic and authoritarian Gaullism with a strong tendency to repress rather than negotiate or compromise had since 1944 become a recurrent reaction to crisis, but not the bearer of enduringly-stable relations between capital and labour, and the reactions of a strong state in the longer term made the Gaullist regime vulnerable to sustained challenge or even overthrow. This was indeed what happened in the plebiscite-referendum of April 1969. Grimaud and Pompidou were willing to make concessions in terms of relations with protestors in order to avoid endangering the political system as a whole, but de Gaulle and Marcellin were far more belligerent.

Global 1968 and the struggle for new orders

All the major uprisings of the late 1960s and early 1970s around the world were against various aspects of the order as established after 1945 and they each took the shape of a search for substantially revised sets of social and political rules. One of the reasons for the intensity of the French events in 1968 was that France was directly affected by several of the different types of profound change that emerged during these years. Key to the post-1945 world system was the agreement between the USA, the Soviet Union and Britain on the division of a large part of the world into two blocs, one capitalist and one Communist, an arrangement which was formalised at the

Yalta and Potsdam conferences of 1945. A little later, the Cold War consolidated this division – albeit in a highly antagonistic way – and the de facto collusion between East and West on the maintenance of capitalism in one sphere and Communism in the other allowed the economies in both types of regime to prosper. During the late 1950s and especially during the 1960s, however, the relative stability afforded by this arrangement began to break down.

In the capitalist West, which enjoyed a great deal of economic growth and improvement of living standards in the post-war period, workers began regularly to engage in strikes and other protest actions because, whilst people had worked hard to reconstruct war-torn countries and allow their economies to thrive, the fruits of prosperity seemed to be distributed disproportionately towards social and economic elites; this was particularly the case in France, where the working class did relatively less well materially than elsewhere and where the labour movement was more marginal than in many other advanced capitalist countries. The number of students in higher education in all industrialised countries grew very fast, an increase which was needed both for the construction of a skilled workforce and for an enlarged managerial caste, but these students were also, paradoxically, proletarianised to some extent compared with their more elite predecessors, and indeed a significant proportion were sons and daughters of working class parents who had themselves been active on the left or in trade unions. Again, France was particularly affected by this phenomenon and, moreover, the amount of money spent on higher education in order to cope with the expansion of student numbers was grossly inadequate.

Next, colonies or former colonies, some of which were outside the sphere of influence of either the Soviet Union or the USA, or had complex relations with the former, had very effective independence movements. This was the case both for Vietnam, which defeated the French army militarily at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and for Algeria, which achieved independence from France in 1962 after a long and bloody war. Part of the significance of the Algerian war in relation to the French May-June was that the PCF had been perceived as slow to support properly the independence movement in Algeria. The Second Indochina War, which lasted 20 years from 1955, played an important role in the formation of the political consciousness of many French (and of course other) students, and the massive Tet Offensive which began in January 1968 was eventually to lead to a withdrawal of the USA from the region.

The PCF remained powerful during and after May-June 1968, with membership in the region of half a million, attracting around 20 per cent of the vote in national elections and a great deal of influence over the organised blue-collar working class in particular, via the CGT. However, French Communists displayed almost unwavering loyalty towards the Soviet Union, even after it had harshly repressed the Hungarian uprising of 1956, although in 1968 it did express its ‘disapproval’ in reaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Younger left radicals in particular were not only supportive of movements such as those in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but were increasingly drawn towards other Marxist currents and leader-theorists associated with countries and/or ideas outside the traditional Soviet ambit, including Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Guevara and Trotsky (Frank 2000) and one of the principal reasons for supporting these figures was that they were distinct from (and in some cases against) not only Washington but also Moscow. The influence of the PCF on the French working class was still substantial, but signs of weakening of this influence were already apparent in 1968, as we have seen above.

Thus, what we might call the breakdown in authority relations as manifested in May-June 1968 was strongly related to the breakdown of authority relations

globally, and in both cases it was not only the forces of capitalism that were contested but also the influence of Soviet Communism (see Arrighi et al 1989). The ‘ordering’ role that each played on the international stage was weakened and the same was happening at a national level in France. Arguably, the period of protest which May-June in France opened up was eventually resolved, albeit temporarily, by the Mitterrand regime after 1981, but in a highly moderate fashion.

[SPACE]

In order to survive, capitalism needs constantly to adapt and to alter the nature of its own functioning; stasis is not an option. It might even be argued, that a certain amount of disorder, of disruption to the status quo, can be used to the advantage of the capitalist system in the process of reinvention or at least renewal. Any examination of a particular historical period is therefore, at least in part, an exploration of the ways in which those defending capitalism are attempting to allow it to adapt and thrive, sometimes successfully, at other times less so. At the same time, actors critical of the status quo seek to influence the course the capitalist system takes in a different direction, to render it more just, equal and democratic, or even to overthrow it. Ultimately, the point of allowing street demonstrations and other forms of protest in capitalist democracies is to allow people to air their grievances in a public fashion – to let off steam - without endangering the system as a whole. Dictatorships, by contrast, are not secure enough in their rule to allow opposition of any significance. Gaullism, a form of exceptional political rule which was the product of political crisis, tolerated some protest, but reacted harshly to any demand for thorough social and political change, and the threat of armed force from the Gaullist regime was ever present.

The head-on collision between, on the one hand, people on the street and in occupied places of work, and, on the other hand, the well-trained, well-armed and often brutal ‘forces of law and order’, was a clash between insurgents and the highly authoritarian but increasingly fragile Gaullist state, but also between insurgents and those who were responsible for conditions in the French place of work, with some undermining of the role of both the PCF and the CGT. The regime led by de Gaulle, born of the crisis of decolonisation which came to a head in May 1958, was a system that had outlived its capacity to function effectively for those in pursuit of a France where the capitalist mode of production was very strong. The question that would ultimately be worked through in May-June 1968 by rank and file militants, by civil servants, trade union leaders, party leaders, by elected politicians, by the secret services, and of course by police on the streets, was what sort of order would emerge in the wake of Gaullism?

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