

# France

# **Locus classicus of student movements**

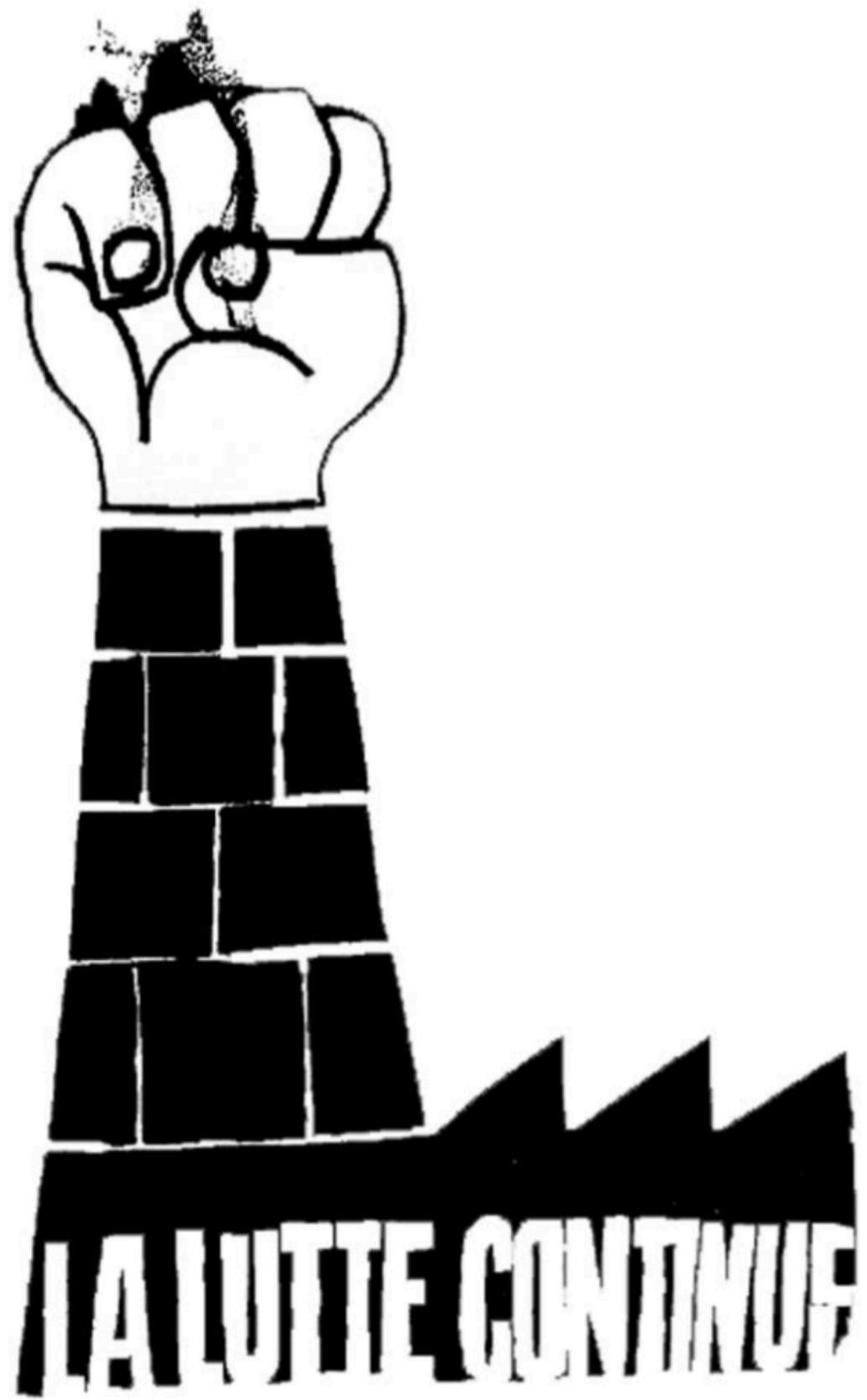
**As much for the art and slogans as  
anything else...**

# **"All Power to the Imagination": Paris, May 1968: The Student Revolt**

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YCtcD9CfMOI>

# **"Paris Riots (1968)"**

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjyKJQ-oD5I>



**May 1968 in  
France**

**It is forbidden  
to forbid.**

**All power to the  
imagination!**

# **Brief chronology of 1968 events**

22 March - Students occupy a room at Nanterre, form a movement.

2 May - Nanterre campus shut down in response to further protests.

3 May - Mass arrests of student protesters at the Sorbonne. Spontaneous resistance.

6 May - Increasingly violent confrontations.

600 wounded protesters, 350 wounded police.

7 May - 50,000 march against police brutality. Tear gas & Molotov cocktails.

10 May - "Night of the Barricades"

13 May - More than a million people march in Paris.  
Sorbonne re-opened as a concession.

14 May - Strike at Sud Aviation plant, soon followed by other Renault factories.

17 May - 200,000 workers on strike. Negotiations ensue over economic demands.

20 May - 10,000,000 workers on strike. Sorbonne occupied by police.

24 May - Paris Stock Exchange set on fire.

31 May - President de Gaulle dissolves legislature, orders an end to strikes.

6 June - Police retake the Sorbonne.

# **Mass strike**

The sale of books went up 40 percent in Paris in those months. This may not be so surprising. In a city where there were no schools in session, where no one could mail a letter, find a newspaper, send a telegram, or cash a check, where no one could take a bus, ride the metro, drive a car, find cigarettes, buy sugar, watch TV, hear news on the radio, or get the trash picked up...

...where no one could take a train out of the city, hear a weather report, or sleep at night in the parts of the city where tear gas filled apartments as high as the fifth floor, in a city like this reading can fill the time. In such details lie submerged some sense of what happens to daily life when 9 million people, across all sectors of public and private employment—from department store clerks to shipbuilders—simply stop working. (Ross 2002:3)

# **A day in the life**

The normal day of a revolutionary would begin at a nearby factory, hanging on the outside gates reinforcing the workers' determination (which meant lauding the barricades and condemning the CGT). Then to the Sorbonne for the afternoon, picking up on impromptu conferences in the courtyard, attending scheduled debates in lecture halls...

...reflecting on police brutality at displays of photos of the fighting, taking notes, and seeking out some new corner of the movement in a committee, perhaps concerning Che Guevara and Freud on human liberation. [...] Nights were spent at the “Ex-Odéon Théâtre Populaire” where revolutionary jargon, poetry, and skirmishes with police crowded the stage until morning.

[Feenberg and Freedman 2001:30]

**Beneath the  
cobblestones is the  
beach.**

***Sous les pavés, la plage.***

**To desire reality is good!  
To realize one's desires is  
better.**

**The thought of  
tomorrow's enjoyment  
will never console me for  
today's boredom.**

**A single nonrevolutionary weekend is infinitely bloodier than a month of permanent revolution.**

The more I make love, the  
more I want to make the  
Revolution, the more I  
make the Revolution, the  
more I want to make love.



**Popular  
power**

**Go back to  
normal...**

**RETOUR  
A LA NORMALE...**



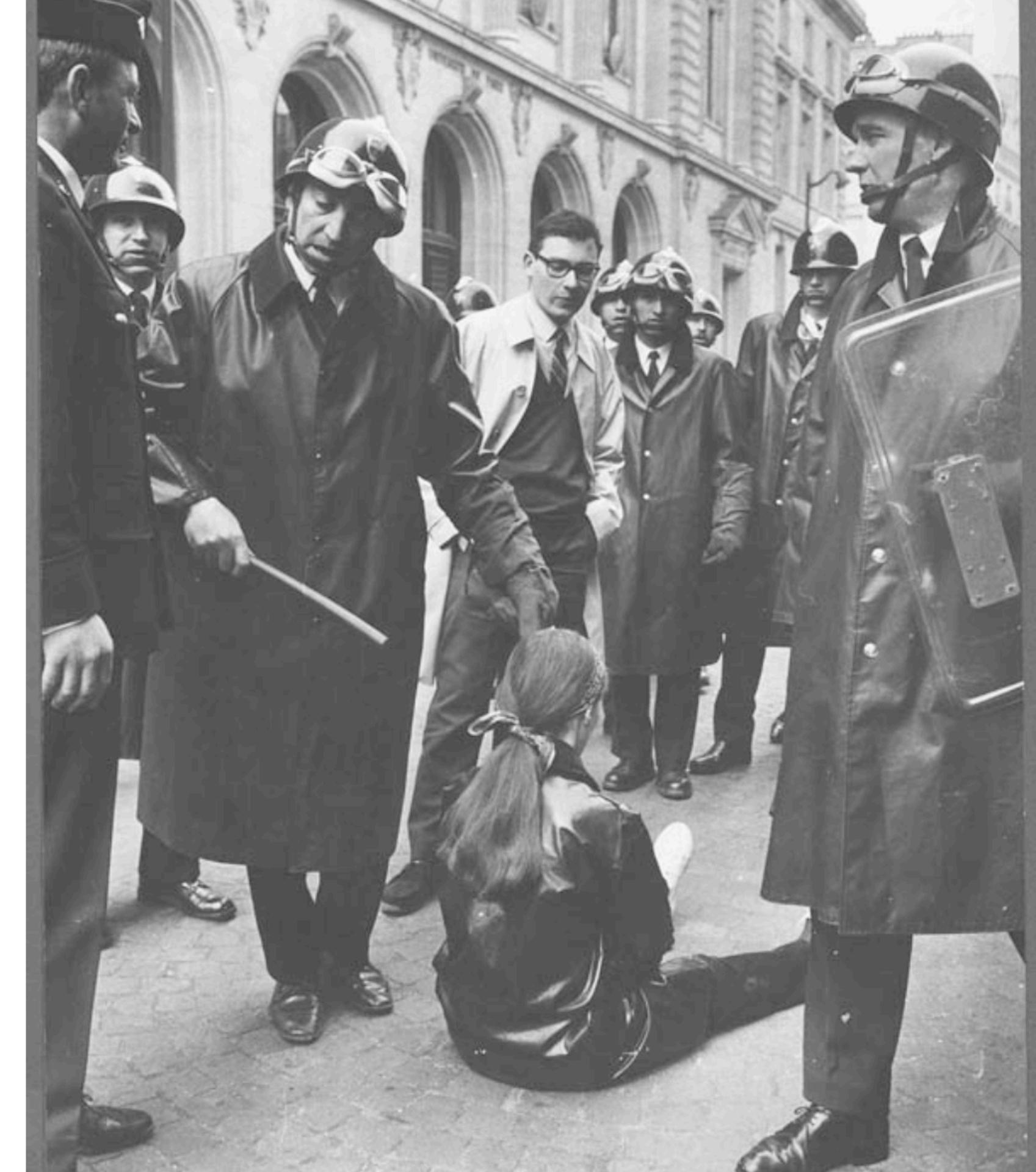
# Defending foreign workers' rights





# Guyanese immigrant workers

# **Young woman at the Sorbonne**



**A different  
sort of  
radicalism**

# **Amnesty of Blinded Eyes**

THESIS 3: In the past, we were just a small minority, necessarily capable of being integrated. Today, we are a minority that is too large to be integrated, but we still have the same status as before. That is the contradiction in which we find ourselves as children of the bourgeoisie.

WE ARE NO LONGER ASSURED OF OUR FUTURE ROLE  
AS EXPLOITERS.

This is the origin of our revolutionary force. We must not let it slip away. LET'S ABOLISH OURSELVES: let's become workers so that all workers can be privileged with the right to CHOOSE THEIR OWN DESTINY.

THESIS 9: THE STUDENT has become the “proletarian” of the BOURGEOISIE, and THE WORKER the “bourgeois” of the under-developed world.

THESIS 10: Students, workers, “haves” of all kinds, let’s continue the struggle for radical change in all the societies of exploitation, oppression and mystification.

LET’S BE WHAT WE ARE AND WANT TO BECOME AND NOT WHAT THEY MAKE OF US IN SPITE OF OURSELVES.

THESIS 13: If our situation leads us to violence, it is because the whole society does us violence.

REFUSE THE VIOLENCE of “happiness” that is imposed on everyone—the scandalous happiness of overwork, of the sale of our labor and our vital energy in exchange for a bauble in black and white or color, which will then be used the better to enslave us and deprive us of our humanity.

**Not traditional  
Communism at all.**

**In fact the French Communist Party was  
hostile to the protests.**

**Nevertheless, a sort of Marxist-radical social critique got coupled to a language of desire and self-actualization.**

# **The state of French students' analysis**

- Highly critical of imperialism, relatively pro-immigrant.
  - Social class analysis is everything.
- Race and gender are totally absent categories.

# How was this seen in South Africa?

*Student activists at the time—John Daniel was then serving as president of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), an anti-apartheid grouping of white English-speaking and some black campuses—followed the events in France in May and June 1968 with awe and fascination. In those pre-television days in South Africa, hourly news bulletins of the BBC World Service were the only dependable source of information.*

*...The idea of a student-worker alliance toppling a major Western government seemed impossible to South African students confronted with an intractable government at home. But “Danny the Red” (Daniel Cohn-Bendit), Rudi Dutschke, and Columbia University’s Mark Rudd provided new heroes and a new set of protest tactics that students at the University of Cape Town would soon put to use.*

– John Daniel and Peter Vale, "South Africa: Where were we looking in 1968?" (139)

## **Image credits:**

La lutte continue: Feenberg & Freedman 2001:78.

Pouvoir Populaire: Feenberg & Freedman 2001:181.

Retour à la normale: Feenberg & Freedman 2001:68.

Defending foreign workers' rights: Jackson et al 2011:111  
(Figure 5).

Guyanese immigrant workers: Jackson et al 2011:95 (Figure 4).

Young woman at the Sorbonne: Jackson et al 2011:246  
(Figure 11).

# Sources

Daniel, John, and Peter Vale. "South Africa: Where Were We Looking in 1968." In *1968 - Memories and Legacies of a Global Revolt*, edited by Philipp Gassert and Martin Klimke, 137-46. Washington: Bulletin of the German Historical Institute, 2009.

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Ross, Kristin. 2002. *May '68 and Its Afterlives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"1968: a chronology of events in France and internationally." LibCom, <https://libcom.org/history/1968-chronology-events-France-%2526-internationally>.