

Post-Industrial Society

Lecture No. 0039 (May 1, 1974)

Transcript digitized in 2026 by the [Harvey Goldberg Center](#), a project of the University of Wisconsin–Madison Department of History.

Preliminary remarks

[*Laughter*] ... I have to tell you, parenthetically, that since we have this time, anyway, I'm going to do a kind of a summary of things as I can pull together, depending on the time that I have to think about anything and the energy that I have to put thoughts into words. But I really didn't think that I was going to get this day.

You know, I have been plunging into this whole thing — it seems to be something that doesn't interest very many people — but I have been plunging into this whole business of the roots of the question of how the police operate on this campus. It strikes me as a very, very important question: whether there is an independence of the constabulary, and whether there is a judgment of the substance of work by the constabulary on this campus. I don't happen to like that principle of independence, and I don't like that principle of judgment — in fact, I don't like constabularies. And consequently, it roots down to that particular question. Now, I've been finding out some rather fantastic things, and I just came from a meeting and will go to one as soon as I leave here, as quickly as I can get out, in order to continue this interrogation.

I don't know what your student newspaper is about anymore; I mean, I don't know why they haven't picked this question up and asked some questions about it. I mean, they ran a front-page story yesterday with the extravagant piece of information that Nat Balkin, Ella's, gave \$150 to [Madison mayor] Paul Soglin's campaign — which must be really one of the least interesting pieces of information... [*laughter, applause*].

And consequently, for example, you have something as vital as what police — who, after all, have (should have) a very circumscribed and a very limited function on a campus — are about. To leave such an issue to the side strikes me as being really very cowardly, to put it mildly. And so I'm sort of angling into that, and what happens here today I don't know, because my head is in other places for the time being. But I'll try to root it down to some things that may speak to you.

[*Laughter*] ... Well, I'll be as specific as I can get, which is that somebody censored a film [the 1973 X-rated film *It Happened in Hollywood*], and nobody tells you who censored it. And now the buck is being passed, and we find out that the police on campus censored it, that they walked in and decided it shouldn't be... Yes?

[*Student asks a question; inaudible, laughter*] ... Well, I mean, I'd love to do any of that, I mean, if you want me to do that. That is to say, I know that there are — are you referring to that, for example, in connection to the — does that have anything to do with this...

[*Student responds; inaudible*] ... Well, I should think that the, let's say, the notion — obviously, on the structural level — the notion of monopoly capital, or the stage of monopoly capital, refers to that period — or that evolution, let us say — in the development of a free-market system in which the major sectors of the economy are sufficiently hyper-centralized and highly structured, so that they are effectively monopolistic, or at the level of monopolistic groups, that control the production and that control the distribution in the major sectors of productivity.

And when you have that, you generally have, after all, policy by governments that are very clearly geared toward the pumping into the economy of sufficient capital, so that there is a purchasing power for those monopolistic goods — goods at monopoly prices — and so that there is a form of market that is adjusted or adapted to the needs of a productive system which is far greater in its capacity than the capacity of people in the whole market to consume. So that you're dealing really with a vast concentration of economic power, and also with that kind of control over government policies that are geared, or adjusted or adapted, to that particular principle.

Now, obviously, if you're dealing with it in a cultural or a systematic sense — if you're dealing with the system or the culture of monopoly capitalism — you're also dealing with the higher institutional, superstructural connection between those particular needs as a way in which, ultimately, a society functions. Now, I mean, I don't know if that helps you, or... [*Student responds again; inaudible, laughter*].

[*Second student asks a question; inaudible*] ... Oh, well that's very interesting. You see, the United States (I mean Kennedy) played a quite duplicitous role in that — duplicitous, I mean, only if you think he had another position. But basically, of course, Kennedy made all these overtures toward the FLN and pressed the French very hard, pressed De Gaulle's government very hard, to make for a kind of adjustment vis-à-vis Algeria.

Now, I think it was done for two very conspicuous reasons: one, because the Americans, after all, were into the petroleum exploitation in the Sahara, and they wanted proper agreements to come at the end of that conflict; and in the second place, because the United States was looking, as it always had been, for points of support and points of influence in the area of the Maghreb and the whole area of the southern littoral of the Mediterranean. And it surely was part, that whole Middle Eastern policy, to wedge themselves into the Algerian political structure as much as they possibly could. And consequently, Kennedy passed for being very liberal on the Algerian question: it wasn't ours, and consequently, what do you get from it?

Anything else? [*laughter*] ...

[*Third student asks a question; inaudible*] ... I'm sorry? [*Student continues; inaudible*] ...

Lecture

To mince no words with the events of May of 1968 in France: that whole world of advanced capitalism which had been created after 1945 entered a time of troubles. Or, to put it in other terms, all of those very finely honed myths that, after all, had been made by the American policymakers and by the capitalist apologists who were in their employ — the Daniel Bells and the [John Kenneth] Galbraiths and the Clark Kerrs and all the gurus of the Rand Foundation [*laughter*] — that all of those particular myths finally were laid to rest.

The myth, in the first place: that the international division of labor is a perpetual and an eternal thing; and that it will guarantee, after all, that kind of continuous and perpetual growth in the advanced capitalist societies, and guarantee also the perpetual and spiraling affluence of its populations. The myth, in the second place: that advanced capitalism, when it reaches what is called that post-industrial stage — by which we mean a technocratic, a computerized, an automatic, a kind of managerial capitalism — that capitalism, when it reaches that post-industrial stage, really has ended the historic class struggle; and that it has drawn the working force into a new stage, and that stage of being, if you please, rather adjusted and adapted and rather defogged consumers. The third thing: that, after all, there was in that particular whole structure of capitalism, discontent; and that discontent, after all, was part of the whole abrasion of growth. But there was no crisis — and that crisis really had been washed out of the system. That discontent could be co-opted; it could be managed; it could be adapted, too: that crisis, after all, as it had existed before the Second World War, that that fundamentally was a thing of the past.

And if you think, if you please, in 1974, from your perspective — as we move, after all, into a period of great crisis — if you think that all of that is perfect nonsense, if you think that that presumption, after all, of a certain kind of perpetual and spiraling prosperity by this advanced capitalism really is a fantasy, just remember that as recently as 1970, Herman Kahn, the fattest of the gurus, if you please [*laughter*], published a book called *The Year 2000*. And in *The Year 2000*, we read these extraordinary predictions based upon the projections, after all, of his particular think tank [the Hudson Institute]. And so Herman Kahn tells us in that book, *The Year 2000*, that when we reach that particular moment, production in the world will be quintupled. And he tells that when we reach that moment, the income — per-capita income levels in the advanced industrial world — will sky to unprecedented heights: that the per-capita income in the United States will be \$33,000 in the year 2000. And he tells us that the consumer revolution will have no end, and that by the year 2000, the average American will have three automobiles.

Now, if you read into that book very carefully, you find some rather extraordinary lacunae; you find certain problems that Herman Kahn really doesn't deal with. And so he doesn't talk, after all, about food supply when he's talking about the fact that in the middle of the twenty-first century, there will be 20 billion people on the face of the earth. Nor does he talk about the raw material problem, and the fact that strategic raw materials may be ultimately in short supply. Nor does he talk, certainly, about anything like pollution or the environment or living space, or the fact that when you make your famous poles of industrialization, what you are doing is under-industrializing those regions that you abandon. He talks about none of that. Nor does he even draw the implications of the contradictions in his own data, because he tells us that, at that time when the per capita income in the U.S. is \$33,000, that it will be \$123 in Indonesia and \$200 in Pakistan. But, you see, in Kahn's Camelot, there are no struggles, and there are no politics, and there is no dialectical process.

And so it is with the great projectors. And it is my contention, after all, that those people who minimize May of '68 — those people who tell us it was a minor abrasion; those people who tell us it was a very minor kind of crisis in the whole spiral of growth, a crisis that ultimately was resolved; those people who look at the results of May of '68 and say, after all, that the perspectives of it failed, that that movement was repressed by force, and that ultimately the rest of it was co-opted by continuing prosperity — that those people fundamentally underestimate or undervalue, or simply misunderstand, the whole dialectical process of contemporary history.

Because I would argue — and it is my hypothesis about May of '68 — that May of '68 was the harbinger of a great crisis opening in the advanced capitalist world: that there was within it and within those events, after all, a reaffirmation, a redefinition, an elaboration of the class struggle, and the historic class struggle; that there was within it, if you please, a deepening of class consciousness; that there was within it the elaboration, in the most fantastic and creative way, of new techniques and new tactics of struggle; that there was the elaboration, in the most creative way, of new perspectives of socialism, of what, after all, a socialist society ought to be, what kind of polity ultimately it ought to have; and that in the final analysis, what May of '68 was was a warning to anybody who would listen that Karl Marx is alive and well, and living in every advanced capitalist society moving now from spiraling growth to stagnation [*applause*].

So it is enlightening, if you please, that it happened in Gaullist France in 1968: enlightening because, underneath all that capitalist space that American policymakers carved out and planned in the period after 1945, Gaullist France was the great gem, the area that had really made neo-capitalism work. Because when De Gaulle and his regime came to power in May of 1958, they immediately set out to do three things: first of all, simply to shove off the colonial crisis and get rid of it; in the second place, to mute parliament and not to have any parliamentary interference

with the growth of this new capitalism; and in the third place, to plan and to systematize and to animate and to subside the expansion, the modernization, of the French economy — in other words, to take French capitalism from what had been a reasonably archaic and Malthusian standard, and to make it really a great and feverish kind of consumer society. And in effect, Gaullist France succeeded in doing that, and it did change the face of that country, and it did rip peasants off the land, and it did capitalize the rural sector, and it did create a crazy consumer society out of that country. And in those ten years between 1958 and '68, the gross national product in France increased 63%, and the foreign trade of France doubled in that period of ten years. All of it an immense success for this neo-capitalism, for this capitalism at the post-industrial stage.

And everybody knew that there were shortcomings; everybody knew that there were discontents. But it is not that they were just growing pains, or pains of adaptation. It is true that there were always shortages of apartments in Paris and the cities, and consequently, people coming in from the villages, the foreign workers coming into the French cities, found it very difficult to find a lodging. They knew, in the second place, that there was a shortage of trade schools, so that by 1968, one-third of the young people who went into the workforce simply had no professional or technical training whatsoever. But all of that, you see, they felt was a manageable or maneuverable type of crisis.

What really was overlooked was the condition and the reality of the working class. And the working class in France is like the working class in Great Britain or in Germany or in Italy or in the United States — don't be superficial about that. Because the plain fact of the matter is, you see, that if the apologists of capitalism say that when you arrive at this new stage of development, that you change the structure and the ideology of the working class — that it no longer is a blue-collar working class, but by now can be professionalized and white-collar; that ideologically it no longer is class-conscious, but it is consumer-conscious — that all of that is a kind of falsification of one essential reality: that the objective relationship of workers to the productive system remains the same, and it cannot be otherwise, and it cannot be else. And that was the problem in France.

Because, you see, if you examine that workforce — and it really worthwhile as a model to examine, that workforce — you are talking about industrial workers who, in increasing number in the period of the Gaullist regime, from 1958 there are 6.3 million industrial wage-earners; in 1968, ten years later, there are 7.75 million industrial wage-earners. But make a parenthesis, and note something well: that the great growth in the number of wage-earners comes between '58 and '64; that after '64, there is automation; after '64, there is a sophistication of the productive mechanism, and workers begin to be siphoned out of the productive system. So that you have in

May of '68 a crisis of unemployment — so that you have 600,000 unemployed in May of '68, which is double the number you had had the year before, and that number is always increasing. And what does that do to the spirit of the workforce? What does that do to the students in the university, who realize that when they come through these lousy two-year programs with their little technical training, that they will go into a job market and not find any jobs?

And in that workforce there are divisions in three, and we talk about three sectors of that workforce. And we talk about the *manouvriers* at the bottom, or the very unskilled workers, and they are to the number of about 900,000 in the period of the 1960s, and they have no clout and they are very close to lumpenproletariat. And note it very well, that with all the automation, those jobs exist. The worst and the dirtiest jobs in the society — the jobs on the building trade sites, the jobs of cleanup in restaurants or in factories — all of those jobs, there. And they are occupied, less than half, by newcomers from the villages; mainly by immigrant workers: immigrant workers coming from North Africa, coming from Turkey, coming from Yugoslavia. And consequently, they are a controllable group: they have no clout. Immigrant workers coming in, after all, are strangers in a foreign land; they hardly know the language, they're fighting and scared stiff, they don't want to be sent back, they don't want to lose their job. And consequently, they'd do anything: they'd work longer hours, they'd work for less than the legal minimum, they don't join unions, they don't join political parties — no threat to the ruling class from this very unskilled group.

But then you have, you see, next to them, a group of workers terribly important. And they are the *ouvriers spécialisés*, the so-called specialized workers, but are really called line factory workers, and they are to the tune of about 3 million in 1968. And they are the line workers in factories like Renault at Flins or Renault at Le Mans, and they are the ones that work a rather simple task, rather mechanical tasks, and they learn how to do it. There is very little initiative; there is the whole structure of the exploitation of the creativity of a human being in jobs of that kind. What you have, you see, is this perfect boredom; what you have is this complete repetition by these *ouvriers spécialisés* at their job. You have them also constantly bludgeoned by what the French call *cadavres*, the cadence of the machine — in other words, there are hourly quotas, and you have to turn a certain number of product, and consequently you repeat that one motion in a kind of a speed-up system.

And you'll remember in *Modern Times* with Charlie Chaplin, how that *ouvrier spécialisé* working in the factory, doing this all day, finally left the factory, out on the street and still doing this [*laughter*]. And it becomes habituated in that particular way. And on top of that, what an environment — what an environment! And how is it possible to talk about the glories of this capitalism when you put human beings, after all, in those factories that suffocate with heat, in

which there is constant danger of industrial accident, in which there is the din of machines so that you cannot hear yourself think? And you are constrained to be silent, and you live your day, day after day, as a kind of silent, mute object in that particular factory.

And, you see, on top of all of that — fear. The fear is terrific. And, you see, the modern factory is a police state. And the modern factory has those guards everywhere, and those *contremaîtres*, and the people who come out of the military to keep the worker in line and to make sure that he doesn't get out of line. And then always that fear, yes, that fear of unemployment: that fear that somehow he will be washed out by another machine, or washed out by a decline in the market. And every *ouvrier spécialisé* in France had the rictus of the coal miners: that those coal miners in the 1950s had had a heyday, because then the Charbonnages de France (in other words, the state coal company) had modernized the pit, but it had made a productive capacity to break, and in the 1960s it began to close pits, to throw coal miners out of work. And everybody who was this kind of very semi-skilled worker had the fear of what might happen to him.

And it remains the same. And there is an extraordinary document, a source that really is intriguing, and I don't know why we don't use it more. And it is a young doctor who was into industrial medicine, and consequently was hired by Simca-Chrysler to be an industrial doctor in the plant — Claude Pigement is his name, a twenty-nine-year-old doctor — and after seven months, fed up, he published his book early this year. And I quote you from Pigement's book about what it is to be at Simca-Chrysler as an industrial worker:

"My seven months at Simca staggered me. I discovered the world of the auto industry: the hourly quotas, the maddening rhythm, the obsession with productivity, the stench, the heat, the accidents, the incredible silence weighing on the men. And the fear: yes, the fear. Here everyone blames it to the environment to be as inconspicuous as possible, for fear of being noticed and losing one's job. In seven months, 4,000 workers passed through my office at Simca, and no more than a hundred ever spoke even a little of their lives or their thoughts. For in their eyes, I was an agent of management, part of the ubiquitous police in the factory. The vigilantes are everywhere — ex soldiers for the most part — creating an atmosphere of overpowering fear.

"And my job? I discovered it was only to prevent absenteeism, not to care for the injured. Management is obsessed with the curse of absenteeism, so that workers often return to the job over my medical advice, which then had been overruled by my supervisors. My task, you see, was to treat those fractures or those burns superficially, so that the workers could stagger back to their machine."

And that role, you see, of doctor as *chien de garde* — as watchdog of a society — really is part of May of '68, also. Because it is astonishing that in every professional group, the young people especially, who saw what was in store for them and what role they would have in the society, suddenly made a manifesto and revealed what they had learned and what they knew. And listen to this document from the National Center of Young Doctors from the 12th of May of 1968, and see how extraordinary it is that doctors are criticizing themselves — it is a rarity in history. And so we have, in this document, this:

"Medical studies bring only fragmentary knowledge. Study of the sick body and of the healthy body: amputating men from two essential dimensions, which are social man and man subject to desires — excluding the social audiences, excluding psychiatry. Analyses made in the form not of a critical apprenticeship, but of acquisition through memory: of a pseudoscience which only finds its substance by means of a disordered recourse to concepts taken over from other sciences that lose all coherency in transit..."

"The importance attached to presence at the hospital, and especially the manner of student integration, are revealing. The students immediately assume the status of doctor and are called doctor the first day. From then on, they cannot do otherwise than tour this mythical image. They are deprived of all possibility of criticism and contestation, nor may they question the kind of relationship they may have with future subordinates."

Now this:

"Capitalist society, underneath that apparent neutrality — liberalism, the medical calling, non-militant humanism — ranks doctors among the repressive forces. They are responsible for keeping people in condition to work and consume" — that is industrial medicine. "They are also responsible for getting people to accept a society that makes them ill" — that is psychiatry. "Although the independence of doctors is proclaimed [*applause*] and defended by the Ordre des médecins, which does not say a word when the police oppose giving first aid to the wounded, this independence is extremely reduced because of the fact that doctors are responsible not so much for combating illness, as for taking charge of it by excluding it from social life. Genuine contestation of illness, implying considerable extension of the idea of prevention, would rapidly become political and revolutionary, because it would be contesting and inhibiting repressive society."

Well, it took a revolution or a revolt to get that wrench out of these young doctors. And I tell you parenthetically that that fascinates me a great deal, because I am in touch with a group of young

medical students in Paris, who are really, really bright guys — one of them happened to be my neighbor, which is how I got to know them — and they are into this whole thing of trying to make really a statement of what the hell doctors ought to be doing in a society. And they have such a long way to go, because that French medical profession, if anything, is more benighted: those people not only walk on water, but they walk in the sky and over everything, and they always are watchdogs of society.

I give you an example: if a woman wants to find birth control pills, she really goes from doctor to doctor to doctor to find anybody that will write a prescription for her. And a great friend of mine, Marianne [*inaudible*], who's an extremely bright philosopher, walked into a doctor's office to ask for pills — somebody whom she knew was not Catholic, had no stake in this — but was just that devout, like the whole profession, really in preserving that unit of the nuclear family — that unit of sexual repression which, after all, is so important. And consequently, she went in and she asked for the pill — and, well, you're supposed to not do that, but then she asked for it very forcefully. And he looked at her and he said to her, "*Si vous voulez les plaisirs, il faut risquer*" — "If you want your pleasures, you've got to take your risks" [*murmuring*]. And she looked him then in the eye and said, "*Quand vous voulez vos plaisirs, vous risquez?*" — "When you want your pleasures, do you risk?" And consequently, of course, it came to a complete cul-de-sac; there were no pills and it was a dead end, because the safeguarding of the society came first. So that what Pigment tells us is what doctors were, after all, when they finally come to this kind of confrontation.

The third strata in this whole structure of the work force, the so-called *ouvriers professionnels*. But don't be deluded by that name, professional workers. These are not *cadres*; these are not technical, scientific workers with that kind of rank. These are the ones with a specific skill. They may be a bit better paid; they may have a bit more job security; they may have less arduous work. But they are closer to rank-and-file line workers than they are to those who are management. And consequently, in May of '68, they went out on strike without any question.

Now, the real problem is: Did the life of the workers in this advanced capitalism get so much better that they forgot they were workers? We're talking about objective situation. Was there consciousness — was there subjective consciousness in the 1960s, or at any time before this explosion, really to begin to explain why 6 million workers went out on strike after the 14th of May of 1968? And, of course, the government and the ruling class, and to a certain extent the opposition unions and the opposition parties, accepted the idea that the material standard of living of the workers was getting better. With regard to that, we are always given something like this: that if you take the year 1950 as the index number of 100, that the wages of workers in 1968 stood at 300; in other words, in those eighteen years their wages had tripled. But that doesn't tell

you anything about the cost of living; it doesn't tell you anything about inflation; it doesn't tell you anything about partial unemployment or periods of complete unemployment. Nor does it tell you that in 1967, 40% of all French workers were making \$1,600 or less per year.

The proof of the matter about this great advance of the workers comes in two very interesting ways. One in terms of the length of the workday: that workers had to work all of those extra hours to make ends meet in this great success of liberalism. Remember, there is an inquiry in 1967 in the parliament, and that inquiry looks back to 1963, and it says that 13.5% of all French workers are working 53 hours a week or more; that over 40% are working 50 hours or more; and that the average is at least 48 hours. So that the 40-hour week became mythological within this particular structure. Add to that the fact that this same report tells us that 500,000 workers in the work force had to have second jobs and were moonlighting in order to make ends meet. The workday, in other words — and listen to this staggering data — the workday in France on the eve of 1968, or you could say down to this very moment, the workday has not declined in seventy-five years. And that, the glorious age of that expansion.

And the second fact is that, when things got tight, they were the workers who suffered. And so we're talking about the so-called plan of stabilization, aren't we? The plan of stabilization comes in 1963 and it lasts all the way down until '68, and the premise of the Gaullist regime is that France has a job to do and a road to go in order to compete in the common market. And if it wants to compete in the common market, it really has to modernize, which means it has to guarantee profits; but also it has to keep its costs low, and that means it has to stabilize wages or keep wages down. And so the minister of finance in 1963 is our friend [Valéry] Giscard d'Estaing. And Giscard brings forth his plan of stabilization in '63, which says that there will be no real wage increases in order to make France competitive; which says that all of the inefficient industrial units will be washed out; which meant unemployment and staggeringly low wages against inflation for French workers; that by 1967, the increase in the wages of French workers was 2.5%, which didn't near take care of the inflationary spiral. Add to that all that great fear of unemployment. Well, how did the ruling class think it was going to get away with that?

They thought it in the same way that every ruling class thinks that; in other words, they thought two things. They thought, in the first place, that workers really are consumers: that so long as they have within their access, consumer goods — whether they are refrigerators or TVs or automobiles — that somehow they will cease to be class-conscious workers. And the second thought was that the work force no longer is a unity: in other words, that there are *employés* (in other words, white-collar workers) and there also is *cadres* (in other words, those technical, scientific, managerial workers), who split any kind of proletarian unity, who split the unity of the work force. And both of those things, you see, turn out to be reasonably mythological. And if

you don't understand that, then you can't understand the dynamism of the whole May movement in 1968.

Because, you see, and here is something that I really hold very strongly — and you may disagree with it, because it is, after all, my perception of these events — and it is that, fundamentally, it is a complete misnomer to think that workers don't know what's happening to them; to think that workers have no consciousness of what their role is; to think that they don't understand that they are workers, that they become *embourgeoisés*, and so forth. It always seems so absolutely surprising, to students especially, when they encounter workers who tell them something about the reality of the work situation and of their own role. I had a group of students, for example, who did for me a collective research project some years ago, interviewing and recording the thoughts of the Gishold workers who had been simply put into unemployment, or simply thrown out of work, on the basis of the closing of the Gishold plant. And they came back, and they were absolutely amazed, because they knew — because the workers knew — what had hit them, and really what kind of forces they were confronting.

Well, I want to cite to you a magnificent document that's put together by Juliette Minces. Juliette Minces is a marvelous sociologist in France; she knows what to do with sociology. And consequently, she goes with a tape recorder, by herself — without, you know, a quarter of a million dollars' worth of grant money, and all that — she goes with a tape recorder, and she talks to workers. And she did a little book called *Un ouvrier parle (A Worker Speaks)*, which is really a superb document, because she chose at random a worker, who was a reasonably old worker in a steel mill. And she got this from him after May of 1968:

"There are *mecs*" — now, *mecs* is simply a French slang word for guys — "There are *mecs* who say that workers have become bourgeois. What nonsense! The working class has never, never been made bourgeois. But workers are cautious. They don't want to plunge into an adventure, knowing very well that it can be a provocation. The men in the factory, you don't have to draw a picture for them. They know that, for the boss, it's only money that counts, not the people who work.

"Production isn't for the profit of men, but for the fortunes of the capitalists. *C'est ça la répression*" — That is the repression, he says — "The whole capitalist, industrial system is inhuman. You are nothing, a thing spied upon and whipped. In May, you see, it took only a few days to make the things that we have felt so long a reality. We weren't fighting only for bread, but for another way of living: to end that constant, latent war in which we are incessantly beaten." A magnificent sentence: "To end that constant latent war in which we are incessantly beaten."

You see the point. The point is that workers — who go day after day and know that they will never have any security in their lives economically; who go day after day and work that horrendous, long workday; who go day after day and are the victims of the relocation of industry; that industry goes out of the cities and into the provinces; that it's put where the industrialists want it, so that they go forty and fifty kilometers a day, in a fatiguing journey, in order to get to their jobs; workers who are caught a *huis clos*, in a no-exit situation, knowing they can't possibly get out of it — those workers know what their circumstance is. And you better believe that.

And the young workers especially. And the young workers are crucial in May of '68: the ones, after all, who did occupy that factory of Renault, who did occupy Flins; who did, after all, the most extraordinary things with the students. And the young workers, why? Because, you see, they have come after that consumer revolution. So the father had acquired what he had struggled for: a TV, a refrigerator, maybe an automobile. But they take that universe for granted. And were they to work those kinds of jobs, were they to do that forever. That was the question, fundamentally, that they asked.

And the other side of that defense strategy: the idea that the work force is divided. Granted, you have *employés* (white-collar workers), you have that tertiary sector, and that tertiary sector goes from 2 million in 1954 to 3 million by 1968. And we are talking about sales personnel, and we're talking about file clerks, and we're talking about typists, and we're talking about all of those office people. But, after all, their identity is with the working class; it can't be anything else. There was an extremely good inquiry done of the sales personnel, the sales girls, in the department stores of Paris in 1967. And those girls had, literally, backgrounds very much like line workers: they had left school at fourteen on the average; they had no professional formation; they considered their jobs dull, with no way out; they couldn't see any form of social promotion. So the result is obvious: that when May of '68 comes and when there is a tremendous outburst of labor activity, these personnel out of the tertiary sector are a little slower, but ultimately they join the strike.

The more volatile element, the *cadres* — what is called the *cadres* by the French, by which we mean the technical, the scientific, the managerial personnel; the people, after all, who are junior executives, as we would call them. And the question is: What happens to them? And here, the answer is very complicated in May of '68. But note one thing very well: that if these people are well paid, they have a fundamental grievance. And that grievance is control over their activity, or control over their job; they want some say in their creative process.

Look, May of '68 was fantastic from that point of view. You take those radio and TV journalists

— the journalists at ORTF, at the official state radio and television stations — and they had had to prepare news broadcasts that were full of propaganda, that didn't tell the truth. And came these great events of May, and they simply took over the news programs. And just think of how it would be if the journalists, who know so much, talked. And they did so during that strike and during that whole revolt. Or you consider, for example, the repertories of actors in the state theaters. And they said, "To hell with these state theaters," and they went out into the streets and into the factories, and performed their plays there for workers who were on strike.

And all of that idea that somehow you don't have control of your creative process, that's very fundamental in the revolt of the *cadres*. So that in May of '68, you get the *cadres* dividing into three possible positions. There are those who are closest to management, who serve as strikebreakers and who do keep enterprises functioning by going in and working them. There are others — and they are the largest number — who are passive strikers, who don't go out on picket lines but really support the strike. But then there are a militant number of very active strikers: the ones that take over their enterprises, like those architects in the state office of urban planning who simply took over that office and said, "We're going to have a different kind of city: we're going to have a city with real living space."

So, then, it's not so clear. And wouldn't it be terrific if the *cadres* in America were really tested? If they really had the chance to get out of those engineering roles and become human beings again? Well, it shouldn't surprise us that the strikes came, and the strikes came throughout the '60s. And I want to tell you something a little personal about that. Those were the years when I got to go a lot — you see, it was the time when you could still travel rather cheaply — and so I was there a lot in those red years of the '60s. And they were rather incredible, because you saw something coming; you weren't quite sure what it was, but something was happening. And that something were wilder and wilder strikes beginning to hit the strike fields, and all of a certain kind.

And I went down to Besançon at the beginning of 1967 because there is a plant outside Besançon, which is the Rhodiacéta plant, and Rhodiacéta is a big producer of synthetic fibers, of synthetic textiles. And down in that very, very modern plant, the workers were among the best-paid workers in France. And they went on a strike which was wild: in which they occupied the factory, in which they seized the direction, in which they demanded other things than wages. What they were demanding were playgrounds for their children, nurseries for their children, they were demanding a certain better housing in the area, they were demanding job security; in other words, they were demanding what one pamphlet that I got at Rhodiacéta said: that "We should no longer be squeezed like lemons." In other words, that they should be treated as human beings; that they should not simply alienate their labor to be treated as commodities in the

productive machine. And then that happened in Nantes, it happened in the aviation industry at Nantes in 1967; the same thing happened at the aviation plants in Bordeaux in that year.

And all of those strikes have three things in common. First of all, that they were all spontaneous: that they were not called by the official unions, and that the official unions were very upset by them. The CGT [General Confederation of Labor], after all, had the idea that a violent strike or a violent confrontation would really disrupt the basic overall strategy of the French Communist Party. The CGT was closely connected to the Communist Party, and consequently it held that the strategy had to be to permit the Communist Party (along with the Socialist Party) to win a parliamentary victory, and then the condition of the working class improve, toward the end of greater integration, really, in the consumer system. So far as the other trade union was concerned, the CDTF — which was the democratic union, the non-Communist union — it did raise some questions about the quality of work and so forth. But most of these strikes were spontaneous and came from rank-and-file people.

Secondly, whatever the demands of these strikes, the tactics and the techniques that were used were much more militant, much wilder, than anything that the French working class had been accustomed to. And the third thing was that the demonstrations, the confrontations with police, students began to join them, and teachers began to join them, unemployed began to join them; in other words, there was the building already of a kind of outline of what would happen on the streets in May of 1968.

And all of that, in a sense, culminated in the great strike at Saviem. And Saviem really should have given a clue to what was going to happen — Saviem was fantastic. Saviem is up in Caen, it's up in Normandy, and it's an automotive plant; what it is is a Renault plant where you make industrial trucks. And at Saviem, you had 11,000 workers, and most of those were new recruits from the countryside, who had just barely come in from the villages. And on the 23rd of January of 1968 — barely the year '68 — they went out on a strike which was really out of the plan, and one of the wild ones in this whole preparatory period, and that really underscores the point that I'm trying to make. The problem, you see, with those workers at Saviem was that they were behind the eight-ball economically: they had, the year before, a wage increase of 1.5%, and inflation was 3%, and they were simply losing real wages. In the second place, the whole plant was like a prison, and consequently, what management did was to use this kind of rotation system in which they kept firing people and then hiring new ones, with ads constantly standing in the newspapers, and then promoting only those people who had really proved their fidelity and their worth.

Well, these workers at Saviem wouldn't have it. And consequently, they simply walked out en

masse on the 23rd of January, and they made their way from the plant on the outskirts of the city of Caen; they made their way toward the city. And at the city gates, they found the CRS — the CRS, the Compagnie républicaine de sécurité, the security guards with the police — and they made a cordon. And there was this terrific fight, and they broke the cordon. And they got into the center of Caen, and they danced around the city, and consequently decided that the next day, they would come back a little better armed. And so on the 24th of January of '68, they came back with sticks and stones and with whatever primitive weaponry they found. And then they decided that the best thing to do was to use the weapons of Caen itself, and they ripped up the pavements, and they ripped up all of the cobblestones. And at the end of that day...

[audio cuts out; laughter, applause]

... and the result was that the workers at Saviem showed a solidarity which frightened the CGT, frightened even the CDTF, and consequently urged those workers to go back to work. The workers said no: what they wanted was pushing it out to other works. The CGT wouldn't do it; ultimately they went back without any concession.

Well, what detonates that? What detonates that, what makes it the crisis of May, is you. And they were the students who detonated it. And the students detonated it because they were in an educational system not unfamiliar to you — which was authoritarian, which was oppressive, which was elitist. And all of that they knew. And more than that, which was putting the casing on sausages: more than that was carrying them out to go into that machine out there. And that was the point of nexus between workers and students: that students, in that sense, were would-be *cadres*; students, in that sense, were being trained for a machine without any real prospect of job security, trained for a machine that they really didn't like and that they didn't want to participate in. And add to that the fact that all of this exploded in Nanterre.

Now, you know, when you go to France, go look at Nanterre. You'll see it a little bit differently now; they put glass there, they've camouflaged it. But you can't. How much can you camouflage, for example, the Commerce Building [on UW–Madison's campus]? I mean, there are certain things like that you camouflage [*laughter*]. And, you see, there's a whole different attitude about what you do with universities. There was time, you know, I taught for years in Agriculture Hall Auditorium here, and there were these great, magnificent windows, because it was a nineteenth-century building, after all — the kind where the bourgeoisie didn't mind being seen [*laughter, applause*], and didn't mind other people looking out — but now, you see, there is this rear defenestration, and consequently there are no windows anywhere [*laughter*].

So it comes out at Nanterre, consequently, and that's the way it was. And they put it out there in

the west — beyond Saint-Cloud, beyond Neuilly, beyond all those posh suburbs — and there was this wasteland of the twentieth century. There were all of these hodgepodge of blocks, all of these empty spaces, all of these old and new factories — a godawful, ugly spot. And there they put this new University of Nanterre, with all of those absolutely sterile buildings, absolutely no landscaping whatsoever, all of it there to process these students. Alain Touraine, who taught sociology at the University of Nanterre (and still does), put it very, very well in terms of what that whole structure really looks like. And he says, "The problems which the students have raised" — oh, no; he didn't say that [*laughter*] — "Nanterre is the university system as it is, not as it appears in the piously constructed hagiography. It is a machine for teaching, that is, for preparing examinations; a campus where no human being is conceived of as anything but an aggregate physiological function: to eat, to sleep, to walk, but not to be a social being."

And consequently, it's that processing, you see, that goes into the marrow of the following protests of the students — of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and those people out of Nanterre that form the March 22nd movement. Ultimately, that student movement, of course, broke out of its confines; it broke out in the most extraordinary way, as you know from reading Singer's book [*Prelude to Revolution* by Daniel Singer]: it broke out of Nanterre because they shut down Nanterre, which they never should have done. Because once they shut down Nanterre, after all, on the 2nd of May — well, they couldn't stand it any longer; and there was Cohn-Bendit every day, and he was giving speeches and so forth — they closed the damn place down, and once they closed it down, everybody moved into the Sorbonne. And consequently, when the Sorbonne, after all, began having these big meetings on the 3rd of May, then they did an absolutely insane thing: they sent the police in to close down the Sorbonne.

Well, you know, it's from that point on that the whole thing exploded. And the important thing is for us: that there is a kind of outreach by these students to workers. And so you get, for example, on the 11th of May of 1968 this document that comes from *Cause du peuple* that talks about the relationship between these two aspects:

"To sever the bonds of the people is our platform. There are two paths open to students: to become the faithful lackeys of capitalism, or to place oneself at the service of the workers, laborers, and revolutionaries. We have chosen to take our place on the side of the people. The employers (or the government that serves them) oppress the people, force them to live in misery; all their pretenses are useless. The facts are there: all the million unemployed, all the ones who have been laid off — unemployed young people, women who want to stay home even though short of money, peasants driven from the land by force — and protesting that they have difficulties too, the employers say, 'It's up to you people to create jobs.'

"The irresistible force is increasing, but there are great difficulties — division is what organized us socialists, in fact — and though there is a call to go out to the people. The movement for support of the people's struggle is made up of all of those seeking concrete forms of support for the working-class struggle. Committees exist in the *facultés*, and we say, both in Paris and the provinces, between them the workers and the students are unbreakable."

Well, the idea of going out to workers didn't work all the time. But it surely worked in terms of young workers, who saw a kind of opportunity to intellectualize or to find a theoretical base for a lot of their particular beliefs. And here's that old worker who Juliette Minces has interviewed:

"The problems which the students have raised are the ones that the workers have posed for a long time. But the students have opened the windows. It is precisely that which becomes dangerous, because the *mecs* begin to see another kind of light — because of the student movement, which gave them a chance to say and do concretely what they had only until that time felt very faintly. To the eternal, everlasting honor of the French students and of all students who supported them around the world!"

And they acted as potential workers, and they acted with a view as to what the pressure point in that society was. And in their action committees that they formed and that workers formed, there is a new form of social protest — outside the traditional parties that were selling out this revolt, outside the traditional unions — that really became the form of creative search for the tactics and the techniques and the ideology by which to struggle and for which to strike. [*applause*]