Dear Rays,

The press office of your letter shows tellingly the extent to which people outside France are concerned and even excited about the present events here. Don't give a damn. The present situation is the same in all countries, while people within France are far more appalled at the spectacle set up by the workers' unions of this country, the socialist-led C.O.T., whose bosses and official leaders are more interested in political strikes engineered by the same communist leaders than in coming up with a solution to the workers' problems.

The C.O.T. has a history of supporting strikes in order to gain concessions from the government, but now they are in danger of being isolated from the rest of the country. The workers' response to the C.O.T.'s actions has been strong and widespread, with many workers joining in the protests.

Despite the chaos and unrest, it seems that the workers are determined to stand up and fight. If necessary, they will take matters into their own hands and stand up to the authorities. The C.O.T.'s general strike is expected to last for several days, and the workers are determined to make their voices heard.

Paris, June 1, 1958

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modern history of France have extremist rightist movements dwindled into nothingness as it is the case today. Granted, there are always Fascist-minded adventurers, but that's what they are—adventurers. Should they be crazy enough to think that this was the time for action, they wouldn't be able to muster two thousand fighting men. (V. Ruggi, a le Pen, a D滚球) are just plain hollogam; even today's Algeria didn't want a Mussolini. That was arrested there, the two others were expelled from the military; they are no more representative of a Fascist movement in France, than McCarthy was a representative of a Fascist movement in the U.S. Let's leave aside the question concerning the nature of Fascism, for instance the fact that it springs into being — I have in mind Italy and Germany, the only two "pure" examples of Fascism — as a result of national monopolistic capital being crushed into bits under the deadly blows of international crisis. Let's rather consider the main sequels of such a situation, i.e. the inevitable dislocation of the State apparatus and the traditional bourgeois institutions, which in turn creates a social void — so that while the ruined capitalists desperately try to reproduce their last privileges they find themselves facing a working class which is also, and at the same time, bidding for power. It is only when the State, its army, its police, its whole repressive apparatus is unable to cope with a working class actually and bodily marching for power that the objective need arises for auxilliary repressive forces: para-military formations, regimentation of labor, destruction of the parliamentary system, physical and moral violence, etc. — the whole brood of bourgeois whines when the bourgeois become afraid. Yet, Fascism, Fascist unrest, mobilizing millions upon millions of people — workers and petty bourgeois alike — is not, and never will be, a project capital will undertake lightly. No, capital loves order, and modern "enlightened" capital has very well learned an important lesson, namely that it is far more profitable to buy off the working masses with big unions, better wages, social benefits, etc., than to fight it out on a global scale... For what? Since day in and day out the workers go on producing surplus-value. It may even be that capital, in some of its more stupid quarters, thinks it has solved the riddle; but however irrational in the long run, capital is not irrational enough to provoke the working masses into a civil war contest just for the fun of it. For Fascism to become a reality instead of being a communist political swindle for agitation's sake, for Fascism to become a real social "being-amiss," there is need for an objective, definite situation: the fall apart of the capitalist traditional State and the workers' consciousness will to fight on their own terms for a radical, revolutionary transformation of the whole social fabric. Do you know of such a situation in France? Are French workers bidding now and here for power? Would you propose — and if you, on what basis — that French capital is on its knees and French State apparatus in the gutter? Would you perhaps propose that French capital is on the point of collapse, and that the present events are indicative of a situation rapidly leading in that direction? Well, let's see. Let's see if it's not rather the contrary.

France's political institutions have not really changed since the birth of the United Republic, in 1870. Though amended, the Constitution of the Fourth Rep. has failed to adjust itself to the new prevailing capitalist relations. The bulk of French juridical & political institutions have worked with property relations as they existed under competitive capitalism. This is due to many factors, of which the most important and, in the last analysis, the decisive one, was the prevailing of land. During the French Revolution and, if I may say so, the reaction, property over the whole compass of the country. Even now, while there is a tremendous accumulation of wealth and capital, France still is a place of small owners, small shopkeepers, small middilers. For instance, there is one shop for every 60 inhabitants; though there are trading enterprises that employ hundreds and even thousands of clerks, the average of salaried employees per business (i.e. trade) is 1-1/4, which means that from 70 to 50% of shops are exploited on a family basis. That is an obsolete, ruinous, and properly medieval
as it is there next to some of the most modern industrial realisations in the
world, such as steel mills, automobile, chemical combines, electronics, dams,
etc., is quite obvious,—yet there you have a perfect example of the cleavage
between "law" and reality, between super- and infrastructure Marx speaks of in
the Introduction of The Critique. (Even in the U.S. there survive such anachronistic
phenomena, as for instance when a few miserable, ridiculous sheep-breeder's, with
no importance at all for the American economy, succeed in getting a bill through
the Senate in "defence of American wool"; the clear result being that, cut off
the American market by high custom duties Australian importers retaliated against
American goods, "inflating" the value of which U.S. industry loses yearly several billion
dollars in exports; the same can be said for bicycles, watches, etc., or still,
for the artificial rate of silver due to the Nevada lobby.) Here and there, since
the end of first world war, attempts were made to adjust the obsolete legal ins-
titutions to the new property relations that were building up in the wake of ex-
panding monopoly capital; but so tremendous was the pressure of competitive
capital represented in the Legislature by hundreds of deputies and senators, so
permeated the public administrations with sinecures and spurious socialist
that all legal efforts to overhaul the "system" as they call it now, was doomed.
In that there was nothing new historically speaking, for each time capital had to
transform itself from one form into another it was compelled to fight it out in a
civil war. The whole history of 19th century bourgeois revolutions depicts the
difficult bloody transformations of capital from manufacture to competition from
competition to monopoly. Yet now the times of bourgeois revolutions are over:
The only revolutions we witness are of rural economies—jumping headlong into
State capitalisms, by-passing the intermediary stages of liberal capitalism. In
France, notwithstanding the schizoid split between the productive forces emerged
within and the old-fashioned social institutions, industrial capital managed some-
how to expand, Fp to a point. But now that point was over-reached, and this is
the story of Algeria.

One remarkable result of these inner contradictions was that the French bour-
geoisie hasn't stopped waging wars since 1870. The informal bond started even
before, with the ill-blamed Moroccan expedition of Napoleon-le-Petit. There is not
one single day for the past hundred years without French soldiers shooting it out
somewhere in the world. Unable to expand "normally" within the national bound-
aries, French capital became to an eminent degree an exportable item (cf. Lenin). This
took on a dual form: financial colonisation of Eastern Europe (Poland, Ukraine,
Czecho-Slovakia, the Balkan States, Czarist Russia to a degree), and military coloni-
fication of Africa and Asia. Whereas colonial conquests gave French capital the
allow-room it needed (raw materials, cheap labor, etc.), the military saga as much
handily provided a vast and romantic cemetry for the younger generations unable
to integrate themselves in a home-oriented economic circuit, the French bourgeoisie
may to the extent that they be garbed up into professional soldiers and gloriously exter-
minated under alien skies. It is no secret that during the seven years of the
Into-Chinese war the very flower of French bourgeois youth has been killed off—
batch after batch, as soon as released from the military academies. The poor stand
of the French army in 1940 was due not to some diabolical "treason", but to the
fact that it was as obsolete as France's other institutions; these institutions
structurally geared to serve the dead body of parasitical capital in the very midst
of a dynamically expanding amalgam of monopoly and State capital. This is not the
place here to launch into a detailed analysis of the reasons which make that Algeria
has been both factively and symbolically, the stronghold of parasitical cap.,
and hence the depository of a socio-political backwardness which is but the expres-
sion of its desperate defense against the onslaught of industrial cap. — calling
for de Gaulle's little conscious of his real role as those who bless or
curse him, the caesars called in their grave-digger.
I am not a seer nor a prophet. But to examine the situation in its essential bearings and the light of what was said above, here is how things look to me—there will be no totalitarian trend, no regimentation, no frontal attack against civil liberties, workers’ unions, social benefits, etc. Modern-capitalist production cannot simply function without the alienation of the working class within huge “cartel” unions cajoled with all the paraphernalia of “democracy.” Modern capital, at least in its present state on this side of the Iron Curtain, is “liberal.” Political reaction varies all its primitive forms and its counter-part. For instance all-out violent strikes belong to the past, to the regal years of competitive capital, which doesn’t mean that its days are definitely over—since capitalist structural transformations take place through a convulsive process. As for the future inevitable dislocation of present-day capital into State and the accompanying social unrest, there will be no doubt attempts at a more “progressive”, non-evolved type of repression—and here Russia is a fair example—quite different from brutal bankrolling Fascism.

With the Algerian interlude, French capital is stepping into its adult shoes. If it is equal to its own task, if it is capable to integrate itself into the European economic unit presently in the making, if it succeeds to invest the billions of dollars now dissipatated by unproductive capital into a modernized rational cycle of a mixed peace and war economy, then there will be no immediate future, no attempt to crush “democracy.” Already, the first thing the de Gaulle government did, has been the suppression of censorship; and if, as is quite possible, the Algerian colonists and their likes imagine that they can start an effective pump, there will be blows on their wooden heads—not by the workers, but by the police—to teach them to behave. In a way, just as in the XIX century the workers thought they were fighting for their liberties; while in fact they died on the barricades for the bourgeoisie’s sake, so the Algerian colonists still think (but already you can hear his sobs beneath their “victorious” communiqués) they have won a battle whereas they have lost a war. Such are the small ironies of history. Now, if French industrial capital is not equal to its own task, if it faces half-heartedly the deeply rooted contradictions of the whole social fabric—e.g. if it goes about its problems in the old-fashioned way (I mean the brutal clumsy direct way of over-exploitation the mass production), which consisted in increasing capitalist accumulation at the price of naked, cynical lowering of the workers’ standard of living, then, yes, there may be broken windows. But the general trend is in the other direction: rationalization of the productive process, increase of the real output per hour-work, high-efficiency exploitation on the factory level, and in counterpart a few crumbs on the workers’ tables which usually do increase their well-being—or to put more correctly, diminish their ill-being in the crude material sense of the word. If then we come to such a situation, i.e. if the transition is somehow rough on the workers’ sides, we will yet see the formation of a “Popular Front” sponsored by capital, who will delegate to its own “left” wing—the most State-capital minded, plianification and rationalization minded technicians of capital—the ungrateful task to keep the workers quiet on the local.

Well, here is a “report”—far longer than I expected to write. You may have expected a more facile description of the current events, in which case I am afraid you won’t be happy with my analytical approach. Moreover, and necessarily so, limited by space and time, I could only skim in the present letter the issues involved. So that as it may, I shall appreciate your reactions.

In some next future I’ll write you my views on the problem of the conscience malheureuse in Hegel’s philosophy. François’s address is 41, Blvd Victor Hugo, Neuilly-sur-Seine (Seine). Best to you and John,

Jean

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