

## The Student's Uprising in France – Veeru

The de Gaulle government in France was pursuing the liberal capitalist policies of USA. In France the social force of corporate business increased. Mainly the social force of US based giant multinational companies had increased.

The French Communist Party instead of advocating and pursuing the policies for the change of capitalist system was employing the trade unions it controlled only to squeeze material concessions from property relations of capitalism. It openly entered into electoral alliance with ruling-class political parties. It was time, when the revolutionaries all over the world were calling for the victory of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. But the slogan of French Communist Party was 'Peace in Vietnam', which was scarcely distinguishable from the posture of equallism. More and more it appeared as an instrument of the system.

On the other hand the students of France were inspired by the revolutionary war of Vietnam. They had already assessed not only what was wrong with French higher education, but with French society itself. With this revolutionary inspiration from Vietnam War, the young militant students set out to challenge the system.

The students of Nantarre of Paris took the initiative for students' agitations that developed in to a student's uprising.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1968 the plate glass windows in the Paris branches of Chase Manhattan Bank, The Bank of America and Trans-World Airlines were shattered by explosives. The government arrested those who held responsible for explosions.

This incident triggered the student's action of protest which emerged in to a collective expression and a social challenge against the system. The students at Nantarre protested against the arrests and occupied the administrative offices of the campus. With this the dean of Nantarre closed the faculty of letters on 3, May and six students who led the protest were summoned to appear before the university disciplinary council.

On 3 May nearly five hundred students gathered with the joining of many other students. Then the sector consulted with the Minister of Education and authorized the entry of police to clear the court-yard. A police contingent arrived and began arresting the demonstrators. The students resisted the arrests by blocking the roads with a barricade of cars, stopping the movement of police vans. Police used tear gas and beaten indiscriminately not only the students but also the bystanders and arrested around six hundred students. Four students were sentenced to two months imprisonment each. With this sentence the protest strikes and demonstrations broke out at provincial universities. On 6 May around ten thousand students marched in peaceful protest through the Latin quarters of Paris. There were many university students amongst them and many teenage militants from the schools mobilised around the issue of Vietnam War. Near Sorbonne the police charged them fiercely that resulted in a battle in the streets.

On 8 May a French Opinion Poll (IFOP) reported to support for students from four out of every five Parisians. But de Gaulle was stubborn to yield to the student demand: the amnesty to the captive students. Massive demonstrations of protests role not only in Paris but in a dozen provincial towns.

On 10, May thousands of teenagers from schools met twice that number students to march in Paris for the freeing of their colleagues. They were blocked by police in the Latin Quarter. Students built barricades of overturned cars and piled up cobble stones. On 11, May police launched an attack. Reports of this attack draw thousands of young Parisians many of them workers race of across the city to support the students' inspiring. Residents of Latin Quarter stirred by the savagery of police gave help and refuse to the injured and fleeing. Students in *stravonly* who had been following events on their radios took possession of their university and proclaimed its autonomy. On that night Prime Minister Pompidou announced the reopening of Sorbonne and implied that imprisoned students would be released.

The country's two main trade unions, including the communist party controlled CGT joined the leading organisation of teachers in calling for mass strikes and demonstrations on 13, May. On that day eight lakhs have participated in the protest march that took place in Paris. The student militants were in the front in the protest march, while trade union bosses and others were behind. With the conclusion of the march, students swept on to the Sorbonne and occupied it. And across France, Universities were seized by their students.

On the walls across Paris, within the university buildings and outside, these slogans were painted: "The dream in reality", "It is forbidden to forbid", "The state

is each of us", "Be realists, demand the impossible", "anarch is as", "the aggressor is not who revolts but he who maintains", "a man is not stupid or clever: he is free of not", "a revolution that requires to sacrifice yourself for it, is a revolution that belongs to daddy" and "beneath the cobble stones is the beach".

The Sorbonne itself proclaimed by its occupation an autonomous popular university was open night and day. Workers along with sympathetic teachers and visitors thought and all talked together what education and what society should be about. It drew tens of thousands of teenagers in to a social awareness and moral scrutiny. Doctors, lawyers, architects, actors, painters, musicians, journalists, broadcasters began to examine the structure and functioning of their respective professions and to demand radical changes.

Fired by university occupations workers began to down tools, and takeover their factories by 22, May more than nine million workers were on strike.

The bureaucratic bosses of CGT trade union were disarmed by the momentum of workers that threatened to dismantle their own institutional control of labour. So they instructed their local trade union officials to do what they could to prevent students from entering the factories and hastened to seek quick concessions for labour from the vulnerability of the government. On the other hand when de Gaulle addressed the nation on 24 May, young workers demonstrated with banners proclaiming "power to the workers" and "power is in the street".

But the secretary general of CGT trade union Georges Seguy with other labour bosses held talks with government representatives of the main employer organisations led by Prime Minister Pompidou. By 27 May an agreement was reached for substantially higher wages, with a list of further improvements in conditions of work. But from factories across came protests against the agreement. When Seguy himself was reporting his victory to twenty thousand Renault workers, was received with catcalls. And Andre' Barjonet who resigned as economic advisor to CGT, declared in a mass-meeting in Paris called by the national union of Students (UNEF), attended by thousands by militant young workers as well, that "Revolution today is possible!".

But the government was adamant. Armed police expelled workers picketing the central post office in Rowen. Most factories stayed occupied until June. To those workers who took initiative in industrial defiance, the impulse was a deep discontent with the nature of the system. It was significantly the younger workers who first responded to the university occupations. For some of them who joined in the student led street demonstrations it was the first time. With that they had

become insurgents in the process. In many worker-occupied factories, straw filled dummies labeled as "capitalism" were suspended from make shift gallows.

The student revolt had detonated a response on some factory floor, the mass of workers were quick to see the possibilities presented. And once they are aware of the power that the extent of their defiance had attained they were not to be bought off by concessions that trade union bosses who had so manifestly failed to lead before, now wrested so easily from the government. The industrial defiance revealed disillusionment enough among younger workers with the functioning of the system and readiness to confront the bureaucratic institutions claiming to represent them. The younger workers roused themselves.

Without working class leadership, without communist perspective only student's movement unable to change the system. The student's upsurge in France against imperialism, solidarity to National Liberation Movement of Vietnam inspired the entire world people.