Extract from Internationale Situationniste at Context XXI

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A Civil War in France

> It is not Catilina on our doorstep, but death.
>
> P.J. Proudhon to Herzen, 1849

n REUBEN KEEHAN (TRANSLATION) ■ SITUATIONISTISCHE INTERNATIONALE

While the current issue of this journal was at the printers (13 May to 2 June), serious events were underway in France. These latest developments could have a dramatic impact on the conditions of avant-garde culture, as well as many other aspects of European life.

If it is true that history tends to replay tragedy as farce, then the Spanish War of Independence has seen its repetition in the comedy of the end of the Fourth Republic. The political heart of the Fourth Republic was its unreality, and its bloodless death was itself unreal. The Fourth Republic was inseparable from the perpetual war in the colonies: while the people of France were interested in ending the war, the colonialist sectors were interested in winning it. Parliament seemed incapable of doing either, but for years it made repeated concessions and resignations to the colonialists and the army in their service, ever willing to hand them the reigns of power.

When the colonial Algerian army revolted, just as everyone had expected it to, it would not have taken much for the republican government to maintain order, and resistance remained necessary and could easily have been executed right up to the last day. But initially, it had to rely on the support of the people through a *parliamentary* majority of the left. In the end, after the conquest of Corsica and the threat of airborne troops invading Paris, it could have depended upon the *effective* force of a mobilized population (with a government organized general strike like that which annihilated the initial success of the Kapp putsch [1] by armed militias). This revolutionary process, which involved calling on conscripted men to rise up against their rebellious leaders and above all to recognize Algerian independence, looked even more dangerous than fascism.

Throughout this crisis the Communist Party was the greatest defender of the parliamentary regime *and nothing more.* But the regime reached this point of dissolution precisely because of its refusal to take into account the voice of the communist majority in the Left. Until the very end, it remained the victim of the unique process of intimidation with which the Right minority had continuously imposed its politics: the myth of a Communist Party working to seize power. The Party, which had not done the slightest amount of work, had thus disappointed and disarmed the masses without ever achieving a single thing in Parliament; all the while making every effort to have its advances noticed by the leaders of the bourgeoisie themselves. These latter can be assured that the communists will never register their first parliamentary success: the regime collapsed before they could have the chance. On 28 May it seemed as if it would be possible to drive the nation — and not the Parliament — into the anti-fascist struggle. But after the CGT's [2] failure on the evening of 29 May to call for the unlimited general strike that would have been the principle weapon of this struggle, the demonstrations of 1 June could be nothing but pure formalities.

The indifference of the masses was due to the fact that for such a long time, they had only been offered a false parliamentary alternative between the moderate Right and the moderation of a Popular Front made all the more utopian by its absolute rejection by non-communists. Non-politicized elements had been anaesthetized by the popular press and radio. A government controlling such means of communication, exploiting them to their fullest, should have had time to inform the country, but the capitalist mode of information followed its natural inclination and successfully concealed the death throes of the regime from the majority of the population. The politicized elements had, since 1945, made a habit out of defeat, and they were justifiably skeptical of such a "defense of the Republic." However, the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators who marched together in Paris on 28 May showed that the people deserved better, and that at the last moment they would rise up.

As yet, this lamentable affair has had nothing modern about it. Fascism has neither a mass party in France, nor a program. Only the force of a narrow-minded, racist colonialism and an army that can see no other victory in its reach, has, as a first step, imposed de Gaulle on France: a man who represents a boyscout's idea of the national grandeur of 17th century France, and

who guarantees the transition to a Poujadist, [3] militarist moral order. For such a heavily industrialized country, there has been next to no decisive action on the part of the working class. Things have sunk to the level where neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat has a political presence, and everything is decided by *pronunciamentos.*

So what happens now? The workers' organizations are intact; public opinion has been alerted; and the Algerian army is still fighting. To maintain its Algerian rule, the colonists, who controlled the government in Paris long before their official appointment, must now rule *unopposed* in France. Their goal remains the intensification to their profit of the war effort across the whole of France, and at present this necessitates the liquidation of democracy in this country and the triumph of fascist authority. If they are still capable of reversing this current, the democratic forces in France must now take their attitude to its logical end: the liquidation of colonial power in Algeria and in France, that is to say the establishment of an Algerian Republic of the FLN. [4] A violent clash is therefore inevitable before too long. The despicable illusions on the role of the President-General, the obstacles facing united action, and another hesitation just as the struggle is beginning might serve to further weaken the people, or even to sell them out, but nothing will hold off the dénouement.

[1] Kapp Putsch: *Reactionary coup led by Wolfgang Kapp (1958-1922) in which the Freikorps seized control of Berlin on 13 March 1920. It was defeated by a four day general strike organized by the ruling Social Democrats after an unsuccessful appeal to the army.*

[2] CGT: *Confédération Générale du Travail, the General Confederation of Labor, France's largest trade union, closely allied with the French Communist Party.*

[3] Poujadism: *Right-wing protest movement led by French politician Pierre Poujade (b.1920), enjoying massive popularity in the 1950's.*

[4] FLN: *Front de Libération Nationale, National Liberation Front, the Algerian revolutionary group that led the War of Independence against France from 1956 until 1962.*

Situationist International: Situationistisch / Situationist: All das, was sich auf die Theorie oder auf die praktische Tätigkeit von Situationen bezieht. Derjenige, der sich damit beschäftigt, Situationen zu konstruieren. Mitglied der situationistischen Internationale.
Situationismus: Sinnloses Wort, missbräuchlich durch Ableitung des vorigen gebildet. Einen Situationismus gibt es nicht — was eine Doktrin zur Interpretation der vorhandenen Tatsachen bedeuten würde. Selbstverständlich haben sich die Anti-Situationisten den Begriff „Situationismus" ausgedacht.

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