

# YOUNG SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

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## OPEN LETTER TO THE YOUTH OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The first weeks in May an immense struggle began in France, triggered by student demonstrations, that has changed the whole political face of Europe -- and potentially of the United States as well. Ten million workers went out on the most massive general strike in history. The significance of this event is all the greater considering the fact that the workers acted on their own initiative; no party or union called the general strike.

For the first time since the end of World War II the workers in an advanced capitalist country occupied factories and took to the streets in a powerful demonstration of their strength and their willingness to fight. The general strike paralyzed France: factories, transportation, communications -- the lifelines of the whole country and its economy -- were stilled; students and teachers closed the country's schools; farmers barricaded the highways.

The workers' actions initially centered around demands for improvement of their economic conditions, but by taking over the factories and occupying the streets the workers demonstrated to themselves and the country as a whole that they ran France. The country was in their hands during the strike; the question was then posed: who would rule France after the strike?

The bourgeoisie and its press throughout the world understood the question, and had a ready answer. They rallied behind de Gaulle with the cry: save France from the menace of socialism (which they called "totalitarian communism") by any means necessary. And the workers? On May 29, 800,000 workers and students marched in Paris, carrying red flags, singing the Internationale, shouting slogans such as "power to the workers!"

But the party to which most of them looked for leadership in this struggle, the Communist Party, put forward a different slogan. In the midst of the most powerful working class upsurge in a quarter of a century the Communist Party of France called for ... a "popular front" government!

Then on May 30 de Gaulle spoke on television for five minutes, proposed elections, and the whole situation was turned around. Why?

The bourgeoisie was attempting to get the fight off of the streets where they were vastly outnumbered and relatively impotent, to divert it into an electoral contest in their territory and on their terms. And the French Communist Party, the largest and most authoritative working class organization, agreed to this maneuver against the working class. The CP and the CGT it dominated used all their influence and power to fragment the strike, to isolate and discredit the militant

workers and students who sought to carry their offensive to its logical conclusion through the workers taking state power. Revolutionary students were accused of being "CIA agents" and "provocateurs." Thus the Communist Party succeeded in getting the workers off the streets and out of the occupied plants and substituting the courting of votes in a rigged election for a direct test of strength between the ruling rich and the insurgent masses.

In its own arena, through the elections, the bourgeoisie won its "victory." The workers had voted for the struggle for power in the streets and factories. In the elections the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parasites who live off the backs of the workers had equal votes with those whose work keeps the country going. De Gaulle won a majority of the Assembly seats, the bourgeoisie solidified its rule, and the workers are back "in their place."

The central responsibility for this defeat rests with the French Communist Party, the counterpart of your party.

From the beginning, the French CP was more concerned with attacking the student movement than with fighting de Gaulle. The May 3 issue of l'Humanite, the official paper of the CP, said of the student movement at Nanterre, where the upsurge started: "The views and activity of these 'revolutionists' is laughable, inasmuch as they are generally the children of the big bourgeois...who will soon dampen their 'revolutionary flame' to go run papa's business..."

The June 15 l'Humanite, appealing for right-wing votes, declared, "We are acting in a responsible way in strongly criticizing the very principles of 'student power' no matter what its form...To raise challenges on the ideological level is good...but this is not sufficient to justify the existence of a university that engages in disputation and criticism." All this while the students were under sharp attack by the bourgeois state!

The attitude of the CP leaders helped the bourgeoisie to set the terms for the confrontation with the workers and the repressions against the Left. K.S. Karol, the well-known left journalist, writing in the June 7 English New Statesman, explained how this was possible without fear of opposition from the CP: "Behind the smokescreen of public polemics M. Pompidou and France's Communist leaders established a secret link at the very beginning of the strikes. Messages were exchanged every day and it is now known who the contacts were and how they operated. The Prime Minister was thus perfectly aware not only that the CP was not preparing an insurrection but was doing its best to contain the mounting pressure from the rank and file, particularly from young workers 'contaminated' by the revolutionary students."

We are not asking you to take Karol's word for it. The facts speak for themselves. Every single action taken by the French Communist Party in this period is evidence of the simultaneous efforts of the Party and the bourgeois government to hold back a socialist revolution at all costs.

When de Gaulle, sure that he would have no serious resistance from the CP, outlawed the leading student organizations June 12 and jailed their leaders, the CP was the only organization on the left to make no protest whatsoever! One hundred members of Parliament in the British Labour Party have protested this outrage while the French CP stands to the right even of these British Labour MP's! Its press continues to repeat slanderous attacks against the student victims of de Gaulle's police -- they are alleged to be "provocateurs," etc.

The leaders of the French CP now try to use the electoral victory for de Gaulle as "proof" that there was no revolutionary situation in the first place, and, therefore, their right-wing course was justified. The revolutionary demands and actions of the students are called "ultra-left" and blamed for the "alienation" of the voters from the CP. The June 24 l'Humanite accused the students of being led by "leftist groups manipulated by the Interior Minister," declaring that "every barricade, every burned car brought several hundred thousand votes to the Gaullist party."

The fact is that the Communist Party lost so much support because it refused to play a revolutionary role in a revolutionary situation. Its claim that there was no revolutionary situation holds no water in light of the facts. The general strike -- militant, solid, and 10 million strong -- put the question of political power directly to the workers organizations, and the CP in particular. The response of the CP was to lead the workers away from what could have been the most bloodless socialist revolution in history and back to bourgeois parliamentarianism. The revolutionary situation passed without a mass revolutionary leadership to direct the struggle. The workers lost confidence in themselves and in their leaders. The CP continued this process through its electoral campaign in which it competed with the right wing as a "party of responsibility and order," making it clear that it represented no real alternative to de Gaulle. In contrast, the bourgeoisie, through de Gaulle, put forward an image of strength and decisiveness. Is it any wonder that the CP lost support and votes among the workers?

What has been the stand of your party, the CPUSA, on these events? What has it done to protest the repression of the students and revolutionary workers by the de Gaulle government? How does it explain the setback suffered by the French workers? The Worker merely echoes the slanders of l'Humanite.

The French events raised in sharp relief the crucial question confronting all of humanity today: will we move forward to socialism, through the workers taking power, or will we let the bourgeoisie lead the world through repression and misery to a nuclear holocaust? The alternatives were posed in France in the context of the greatest opportunity for socialist victory in Europe over the past quarter of a century. Socialist tendencies of every variety were tested there. And the French Communist Party, your party, and their allies throughout the world stood against the struggle for workers power at a time when the socialist forces could have won an easy victory.

The matter is not closed. The struggle continues. The French workers and students have suffered a setback, but not a crushing or final one. Moreover, the international radicalization of workers and students has been spurred on by the French uprising. So has the questioning of the role of the Communist Party by millions who are beginning to look toward the socialist revolution as the only answer to the problems confronting the human race.

These revolutionary forces see your party, not as a leader in this struggle for socialism, but as an obstacle in that very fight. The capitalist press in Paris and New York shares this opinion. Possibly you have already found yourself in a position of having to try to defend its actions in France. As the revolutionary struggle continues to grow, you won't find it any easier to explain the role of your tendency in France or anywhere in the world, especially here in the United States.

We urge you to study the French events, to analyze the role of your movement -- and to take a look at the alternative program we offer you, the program of revolutionary socialism. The actions of our comrades, of the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire, in France are being taken as examples by radicalizing youth across the United States and around the world. More and more young people are looking to us as the developing leadership of the struggle for socialism. Ask yourselves why.

The French events pose sharply the key question facing socialist and radicalizing youth today: what program can lead the working class to victory in France, in the United States, and throughout the world?

Those who would lead the American revolution have a special obligation to explore this question openly and fully. In this spirit we propose a public debate on the French events between spokesmen of your party and our organization -- any time, any where, through public meetings or through our respective publications. We are confident that our analysis of France and the perspective which flows from it will hold up well in such a debate. How about you?