

May 28, 1958

Dear Jean:

One-half million people out on the streets in Paris, say the air waves, and this is the first good news in two tense weeks since everyone from the Communists to Pflimlin were playing politics --and only the counter-revolution in Algeria, in Corsica and in France itself, that which headed by de Gaulle acting seriously, striving for power a la Hitler.

Is it too late--have 10 years of Communist-Socialist thwarting of the masses' desire for a new society taken its toll and de Gaulle will reach power nevertheless?

In any case it is a cinch such questions are not decided in parliamentary halls but on the streets and only mass action can possibly prevent the inevitable bourgeois move to fascism, with America smiling on a la Eisenhower who has already informed us today that "I like de Gaulle."

The fate of Europe has never been more at stake since 1939--and if you could at all write us an on-the-spot report it would be great not only in informing the American workers, but preparing solidarity action, to whatever limited extent that is possible when you are as few as we are, for the eventualities that are sure to keep on developing in the next few critical weeks and months.

I don't know whether I had sent you previously a copy of the small workers' newspaper that I am now connected with, NEWS & LETTERS, but I sent you one underseparate cover now, and in any case you would know the audience I have in mind.

The last 2 weeks we have all been living in France but it is absolutely impossible to have a full picture when you are not physically there and have contact with French workers, intellectuals, and the spirit of France in general. Last week I had also written to Damen in Italy who has contact with a small group in France called Socialisme ou Barbarie (a periodical in which CLRJames has a hand, by the way) and who I assumed would have gone to France to see what can be done for a report as Italy sees it for anything this serious happening in France really means all of Western Europe. You get a shudder pass through to you to think that WW II could have happened and gone, and all the revolts in the colonies, and the mass parties and the small left groupings and yet Fascism could once again reenter the scene and ahead of the H-Bomb and Ue-USSR world struggle for power triggering off WW III.

I know this is the time for action, not for words, but analysis cannot really be separated from activity, and so I repeat, if at all possible, please do write at once on the situation in France.

Yours,

Raja

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Paris, June 1, 1958

Received 6/7/58

Dear Raya,

The pressing tone of your letter shows tellingly the extent to which people outside France are concerned and even excited about the current events in this country, while people within France at least for the time being - literally don't give a damn. The lesson one would be unforgivable not to draw from the present situation, is the ~~total~~ total absence of the working class on the political scene. Surely, there are millions of them, but only as an economic category; as a body capable to voice their own aims in a fighting spirit, they simply do not exist. Not now, at any rate. Today, Sunday, the sky being bright, they went fishing in masse; and this very evening, in masse, they'll go to the movies. Of the three workers' unions of this country, the socialist led F.O. has no other moving power except its distrust and hatred towards the communists, a deeply rooted bitter-antagonism fed by memories of the brutal repressive anti-labor policy of the commies at the time they were commissars in de Gaulle's government, and the more recent memories of the purely pro-Russian equally labor-breaking political strikes engineered by the same commies once they were out of government; the catholic C.F.T.C., whose bosses and to a lesser degree rank and file are more "left-minded" than the F.O. outfit, but not really enough to make love with the communists (by the way, it is a remarkable thing that catholic workers and intellectuals are morally, if not politically, more courageous and more honest than the traditional "left"); and the thoroughly communist infiltrated C.G.T., the biggest union of them all -- but none the less entirely isolated from the other formations. What that isolation really means is shown by the C.G.T.'s appeal for a local (it concerned only Paris) general strike of one single afternoon (May 19) it was meant, in fact, to get a feeling of the workers' response, a feeling of their readiness to stand up and fight -- if necessary. Well, the most inflated figures don't go beyond a 15% answer to the call! It was a resounding flop, the more so that not even all the C.G.T.'s party indoctrinated troops answered present. On the other hand, may I point out that the "one-half million people out on the streets in Paris" -- a parade in which ^{you} eagerly look for "the first good news in two tense weeks" -- were just about two hundred thousand, half of them on-lookers. Oh yes, there were workers among the remaining hundred thousand, but also Messrs. Daladier, Mendes-France, Philip, Gazier, etc., and their clientele, all past, present or future ministers of French capital, yelling "Vive la République!" under the benevolent eye of thousands upon thousands of cops whose saint patron is Jules Moch, a "minority socialist" if you please, the same Moch who with the knowing collaboration of his Stalinist colleagues in the first de Gaulle government had workers so well clubbed to death that Time Magazine calls him the toughest cop France can boast of. Thus they went, a "disciplined" parade relegated to the peripheral sections of gross-Paris, without a single class-conscious slogan -- only the C.P. activists yelling "Fascism went pass!" a yell bursting with demagoguery, a yell with no more revolutionary reality in it than there is socialism in the rotten souls of Messrs. K. or Mollet. And yet, you see, were it not that the workers have alienated their class-consciousness into the hands of communist & socialist parties and their union bosses, were it not for that, I'd consider the absence of the workers "out on the streets" as a positive, encouraging phenomenon: it would have meant that they refused to endorse capitalist solutions for capital's sake, refused to fight and die for one form of class-domination against another -- as they so often did in history. It would have meant that they understood that, should they fight for the Fourth Republic against de Gaulle's Republic, there was only one possible issue: their dead bodies. Yes, it would have been a great exalting thing, were they absent on the streets by clear deliberation. But no, if they aren't there it is not by clear deliberation, it is by default.

Now, what is all that fuss about fascism? Where are the big rightist masses, their organisations, their political parties, their crowded rallies? Never in

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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 goons. (A Biaggi, a Le Pen, a Demarquet,) are just plain hooligans; even today's Algeria didn't want of their kind; the first was arrested there, the two others were expelled manu militari; 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 cartels. 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 recapture their lost 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 machinery, is unable to cope with a working class actually and bodily reaching for power, that the objective need arises for auxiliary repressive forces: para-military formations, regimentation of labor, destruction of the parliamentary system, physical and moral violence, well -- the whole brothel of bourgeois ethics when the bourgeois become afraid. Yet, Fascism, Fascist unrest, mobilizing millions upon millions of people - workers and petty bourgeois alike - is not, and never was, and never will be, a project capital will undertake lightheartedly. 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 living menace, there is need for an objective, definite situation: the falling apart of the capitalist traditional State and the workers' conscious 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 yes, 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 brink 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 Third 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 are still today tuned into resonance 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 parcelling of land during the French Revolution and, if I may say so, the atomisation of 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 middlemen. For instance, there is one shop for every 40 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 80% of shops are exploited on a family basis. That this is obsolete, ruinous, and properly medieval

as it is there next to some of the most modern industrial realizations 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-breeders, with no importance at all in the American economy, succeed in getting a bill through the Senate in "defense of American wool", the clear result being that, cut off the American market by high custom duties Australian importers retaliated against American goods -- a "deal" in 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 institutions to the new property relations that were building up in the wake of expanding monopoly capital; but so tremendous was the pressure of ~~the~~ competitive capital represented in the Legislature by hundreds of deputies and senators, so permeated the public administrations with sons and nephews of small capitalists, 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. But now the times of bourgeois revolutions are over. The only revolutions we witness are those of feudal economies jumping headlong into State capitalism, by-passing the intermediary stages of liberal capitalism. In France, notwithstanding the schizoid split between the productive forces ~~which~~ ~~and~~ the old-fashioned social institutions, industrial capital managed somehow to expand. ^{up to a point.} ~~But~~ ^{now} that point ~~has~~ ^{was} over-reached, and this is the story of Algeria.

One remarkable result of these inner contradictions was that the French bourgeoisie hasn't stopped waging wars since 1870. The infernal rondo started even before, with the ill-fated Mexican 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 boundaries, French capital became to an eminent degree an exportable item (cf. Lenin). This took on a dual form: financial colonization of Eastern Europe (Poland, ~~and~~ Czechoslovakia, the Balkan States, Czarist Russia to a degree), and military colonization of Africa and Asia. Whereas colonial conquests gave French capital the elbow-room it needed (raw materials, cheap labor, etc.), the military saga as such handily provided a vast and romantic cemetery for the younger generations: unable to integrate them into a home-centered economic circuit, the French bourgeoisie saw to it that they be garbed up into professional soldiers and gloriously exterminated under alien skies. It is no secret that during the seven years of the Indo-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 Franco's other institutions, those 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 become, both effectively and symbolically, the stronghold of parasitical cap., and hence the depository of a socio-political backwardness which is but an expression of its desperate defense against the onslaught of industrial cap. - Yelling for de Gaulle, himself as little conscious of his real rôle as those who bless or curse him, the colons called in their grave-digger.

I am not a seer nor a prophet. But to examine the situation in its essential bearings and in 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 "autonomous" unions capped with all the paraphanelia of "democracy". Modern capital, at least in its present state on this side of the iron curtain, is "liberal". Political reaction ~~is~~ all its primitive forms (and its counter-part, for instance all-out violent strikes) belongs to the past, to the regnal 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 capital and the accompanying social unrest, there will be no doubt attempts at a more "progressive", more "evolved" type of repression -- and here Russia is a fair example -- quite different from brutal ineffective Fascism.

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With the Algerian interlude, French capital is stepping into its adult shoes. If it is equal to its own tasks, 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 dilapidated by unproductive capital into a modernized rational cycle of a mixed peace and war economy, then there will be, ~~in~~ in the immediate future, no attempts 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 colons and their likes imagine that they can start an effective rump, 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 XIXth 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 colons still think (but already you can hear hiccoughs beneath their "victorious" communiqués) they have won a battle whereas they have lost a world. Such are the small ironies of history. Now, if French industrial capital is not equal to its own tasks, if it faces half-heartedly the deeply rooted contradictions of the whole social fabric - for instance if it goes about its problems in the old-fashioned way (I mean the brutal clumsy direct way of over-exploiting the masses, proper to competitive cap., though naturally over-exploitation is accentuated under industrial cap.) 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: rationalisation of the productive process, increase of the real output per hour-labor, high-efficiency exploitation on the factory level, and in counterpart a few crumbs on the workers' table which actually 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' side, 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, planification and nationalization minded technicians of capital - the ungrateful task to keep the workers short on the leash.

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Well, here is a "report" -- far longer than I expected to write. You may have expected a more factual appraisal 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. Be that as it may, I shall appreciate your reactions.

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

Jan
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June 6, 1958

Dear Jean:

Thank you very much for your lengthy analysis of June 1, just received. It is not reportorial enough for NEWS & LETTERS and will need much cutting, but there is no substitute for on-the-spot writing, even when it tends to historical retrospection and economic summations. Moreover, for giving me an insight into what the Marxist intellectual is thinking in ~~France~~ these critical days, it is invaluable. I trust you will not mind however if I disagree violently with your approach. You yourself do find it necessary when you speak of apathy and "total absence of working class on the political scene" to modify it with phrases like "at least for the time being", "not now, at any rate." And therein lies the difference in methodology between you and me.

Remember 1914 was a great deal worse than "apathy"-- socialist was killing socialist across national boundaries. Bukharin was no traitor, Kautskyian centrist; no ~~one~~ ^{one} was to the "left" of even Lenin whose slogan of transformation of war into civil war he accepted. Yet, when he insisted on taking his point of departure not the betrayal of the leadership but what he called "the chauvinist conduct of the masses", Lenin bore down upon him with everything from "imperialist economist" to "proof of how imperialism suppresses thinking." The point was not that he was not aware of the fact that the masses did follow the imperialist war cry but that he refused to judge by surface phenomena. Ultimately, the proletariat would find its way to revolution; no other class would; none could bring it about and start the new chapter in humanity's development. Lenin's genius indeed consisted in this, that at no time--whether it was the greatest reactionary period in history like Russia 1908 or the collapse of the 2nd International 1914--at no time did he forget the highest point of development during a revolutionary period and that, and nothing else but that, was always his point of departure. Soviets were built in 1906 and when they started all over again in 1917 on a mightier scale everyone could see. The point was not, ^{the civil} 1905 or 1917, but who could hold on to them and never let go in 1908 and 1914? If you do not start out with that--with not an immediate phenomenon but a fact in the Hegelian tradition, which takes in condition and activity, then where can you possibly go now when the proletariat, after 10 years of CP-SP-CGT "leadership" ^{is} stopping to think before plunging into mass actions under that leadership. Again, you yourself, say that if the 250,000 were really that instead of half onlookers and many who followed Pierre Mendes-France etc., if the workers had really stayed away because they endorsed no capitalist solution, it would have been an "exalting thing" but you fear they did so only by default because "the workers have alienated their class consciousness into the hands of communist and socialist parties and their union bosses."

But who else on the scene these past 10 years when the workers flocked by the millions into the CPs of Western Europe did have a comprehensive enough view of Marxism to have become a new polarizing force? Who listened to them when thousands did drop away and stopped to analyse the social composition of those CPs and see which strata of the working class did remain in, where the deepest layers had gone, and what they were doing? Isn't the fact that only the teachers strike was successful show how middle-class the

composition of the CP? Where is the movement from theory which

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based itself on these deepest layers and unified that movement from practice into a new totality—whether you call that Hegel's Absolute Idea or Marx's "new passions and new forces" for the reconstruction of society? The theoreticians must answer to history; the proletariat will certainly do so.

I agree with you that de Gaulle isn't "classical" Fascism—when does history ever repeat itself exactly?—but I do believe that here too you underestimate the reaction that will follow. Evidently big capital is ready to break finally with the small capitalists which have plagued France since 1870, have not let it take full command a la Germany and thus compel it to sit on the Maginot line, is making it lose out once again not only to state capitalism a la Russia but modified private-state ala US or even West Germany. Evidently also the colons in Algeria who brought de Gaulle to power do not have a good representative in him—although I would never agree with you that he was actually their "gravedigger", —but if you think that he can get France out of its mess without moving in against civil liberties, the proletariat, the Moslem revolutionaries—and there will be much more than just "broken windows", then you are quite mistaken. Of course, when the revolution itself is not on the streets in Paris, there is no need for the counter-revolutionary mass force of fascism, but, but, but:

1) This is just the first act, not the last. The national revolution will continue in Algeria. I read in the paper that after de Gaulle made his speech about "we're all Frenchmen now", and the crowd had dispersed, some "wild youth, Moslems" ran through in a car shouting "Frenchmen, to the gallows!" Nothing short of independence will halt that war, whether de Gaulle is just a transition to DeBecque or is the "real authority."

2) Exploitation in the "primitive forms" may not be the "preferable" way of present-day world capital which is learning a few tricks from Russian state capitalism, but when the movement against the workers' standards begins—as it must, (whether de Gaulle would like or would not like to have trade unions functioning,—he will have no more choice than did Russia when she found she must satisfy her trade unions if she would make herself "catch up to advanced capitalism")—then you will have the second act in Paris itself. When Hitler invaded France in 1940, the proletariat was set back, but when Hitler began taking slave laborers to Germany, you had the Resistance Movement.

3) There is no "order" such as world capital would like it; indeed if world capitalism had stabilised itself and found order then the revolutionary perspectives would indeed be dim. But the truth the crisis is total and world wide and no matter how ruinous the weapons, and the fact that surplus value comes from its own proletariat, Us-USSR global struggle will come to a head sooner or later. The point is every victory a la de Gaulle, NATO, defeat of Hungarian Revolution, compounds the overwhelming obstacles in the way of a new society being born, and helps confuse the intellectuals who are not at the point of production. You have an interesting thought that capital will be sponsoring "the Popular Front" but French capital does not have a Labor Party as integral to it as does Britain, and these are not built up overnight by "I de Gaulle proclaim."

Do please keep me in touch with the situation *Boyer*