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Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Michael Seidman's review of Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968*.

*H-France Review* Vol. 1 (November 2001), No. 44

The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol1reviews/vol1no44seidman.pdf>

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Monday, 17 Dec 2001

Daniel Gordon  
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I read with interest Michael Seidman's review of 'When Poetry Ruled the Streets', which makes some important points. However I think that there are references to a large peasants' demonstration, and to co-operation between urban radicals in Nantes and local farmers over food distribution, in Charles Posner, 'Reflections on the Revolution in France: 1968' (Penguin, 1970).

There is also a reference to a Comité de liaison ouvriers-étudiants-paysans, which also attempted (not very successfully) to distribute food from its source to shantytowns in the Paris region without a commercial intermediary, in Ronald Fraser et al, '1968' (1988). One of the Atelier Populaire posters touched on this theme with an image of a peasant, an urban worker and an intellectual co-operating. Whether this ideology reflected reality is of course a different matter: I don't think there has been much research into the reaction of the rural population to 1968.

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Monday, 24 Dec 2001

Todd Shepard  
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As we are discussing mai-juin 1968... Would anyone know of a translation into English of the Introduction or excerpts from (or all of) Alain GEISMAR, Serge JULY and Erlyn MORANE, *Vers la guerre civile* Editions et publications premières, 1969)? Or other translations of Gauche proletarienne texts, perhaps in a document packet etc, that explicitly link their project to third world struggles? I am trying to firm up a syllabus while in France and sorely lack access to what is available in translation...

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Monday, 24 Dec 2001

Jack Kessler

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An interesting - looking piece, not the 1969 item which you seek but perhaps useful, appears online in one of Amazon's Z-Shops as follows: and the translator of this may be a good person to ask about translations of the other.

Good luck in trying to "link their project to third world struggles": as I remember it, the Third World was as skeptical about all that as the guys at Renault were...

--oOo--

\* Cohn-bendit, Daniel, Duteuil, Jean-Pierre, Geismar, Alain, Sauvageot, Jacque... Price: \$13.95

Description: Author: Cohn-bendit, Daniel, Duteuil, Jean-Pierre, Geismar, Alain, Sauvageot, Jacques; Bourges, Herve (Editor)

Title: The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak

Publisher: Hill and Wang

Place of Publication: New York

Date of Publication: 1968

Edition: First Edition

Binding: Trade Paperback

Condition: Very Good

Keywords: French, Politics, French, Student, Revolt

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Tuesday, 25 Dec 2001

Lee Whitfield  
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Re the inquiry about Geismar, July, and Morane, you might find the analyses of "The Different Brands of Maoist in Keith Reader and Khursheed Wadia's *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*.

I note another more alternative approach in my treasures that might be helpful --*Worker-Student Action Committees: France May '68* published by the Black and Red Press in Detroit in 1970. Also, check the Hoover Institution Archives for multiple sources.

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Tuesday, 18 Dec 2001

Bernie Moss  
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I would also like to comment on Seidman's review of Feenberg as a participant historian in May-June 1968 at the Sorbonne and Jussieu in Paris.

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I agree with Seidman that there has been too much New Left mythologizing about the events. The protests of May-June against both the Gaullist regime and consumer society were complex, socially contradictory and basically a-political. The student movement at the Sorbonne and in the Latin Quarter was largely manipulated by far-out anarchists or surrealists from the Situationists and Cohn-Bendit's group. The protest created a moment of freedom from the daily grind and a festival of sociability for middle-class professionals with links to the university and high culture. There was little evidence of either spontaneity or formal democracy in these 'happenings'.

The student movement sparked off the largest general strike in French history, but it was basically a wage break-out after ten years of Gaullist repression that never escaped the control of the CGT. The movement had little chance of overturning General de Gaulle because of its own intractable contradictions. Until the Communists and Socialists signed the Common Programme in 1972, the Right reigned supreme. A 1970 survey of worker opinion showed little evidence of any radicalisation.

The party that later drew the most strength from the events in terms of recruitment and ideological renovation were the so-called betrayers, the Communists, but they were unable to manage these now internalized contradictions, and most of the post-soixante-huitards except for some unperturbable Trotskyists ended up, as Regis Debray and Luc Ferry have noted, as very conventional neo-liberal individualists in the 1980s.

There evidently was an attempt to link up with radical peasant groups, notably by the anarchists around Nantes. As delegate of the Comite d'etudiants americains at Jussieu I remember receiving fresh produce daily from 'revolutionary' peasants.

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Wednesday, 19 Dec 2001

Paul T Werner  
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In re: Seidman's review and Moss's comment. I too "was there," as a member of the CGT and a delegate to various groups. I was at the discussions over the taking of the Odeon, I was at the Odeon after the taking, on-stage, being denounced by Cohn-Bendit. I was by (not necessarily with) Cohn-Bendit during the breakaway march at Denfert. I was at Flins and I was jailed.

Perhaps that is why I don't feel quite up to the sweeping statements of Moss or Seidman. More to the point, I don't quite see how Seidman can be said to have reviewed a book for this list, when he has merely listed the points where he, Seidman, imagines he's "right" and the authors are "wrong."

Right or Left, a little bit of modesty would suit us all.

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