

france: all quiet on the french front

(2006)



(written by me in March - April 2006)

Most of this was completed on March 26th 2006 at the height of the movement in France against the CPE, and then updated for the following 2 weeks or so as the movement flowed and ebbed. It inevitably expresses the optimism of the moment, with all its over-simplifications.

A major social movement against neo-liberal policies is currently developing in France. Nationwide, it's the biggest thing since May '68, though it's a long way from the social explosion of 38 years ago, which at that time was clearly the most intensive proletarian assault on class power since 1917- 21. It could die a sad death, but this will probably take some time. At the moment it is a significant social crisis.

France has been bubbling up on and off since 2003 (see “French movement 2003”, “Culture in danger - if only”, “Lycée movement 2005”, and a leaflet on the riots of November 2005). The pretext for the latest movement is, in itself, fairly unimportant: a change in the labour laws which makes it possible for bosses to sack under-26-year-olds in the first 2 years of employment without giving any reason (the name of this contract is CPE; Contrat Première Embauché[1]). Even the French equivalent of the CBI admits that it doesn't change much, except for small or average-sized private companies (on March 22nd, the employers' movement Ethic “deplored” the “catastrophic consequences” of the CPE on the image of employers). But anyone who knows anything knows that if they get away with this, it'll be extended to all workers, as has happened in Germany. At the same time, there are many workers who are on short-term contracts far worse than the CPE. The CPE's just a little straw - but, for a lot of people, it's the last one. And, without wishing to make a simplistic equivalent, there have been many uprisings that have begun from fairly small beginnings (May '68, for example, partly began against university dormitories being segregated according to gender). On the other hand, the fact that the focus is excessively concentrated on withdrawal of this specific contract severely limits the discourse about what's going on (“equality of opportunity”, “democracy”, “rights”, etc.).

Let 's re-cap a bit on what 's been happening. The movement started out as a student movement, and it's still the centre of the movement even though loads of others are joining in. The movement started off with an occupation of the University of Rennes, in the North West, about 7 weeks ago, and fairly quickly spread to other universities, some being blocked, some partially occupied. Today there are 68 universities out of 84[2] on strike &/or partly occupied &/or blockaded, usually with daily (sometimes twice daily) meetings carried out in the form of General Assemblies (AG, in French). Even the Law and Economy students in Tours (until now dominated by an extreme right and violent trade union) has gone on strike and made AGs. Many of these AGs are open to everyone - not just students, and even outsiders can vote on the various motions.

However, all this doesn 't mean that students are not studying, just that lectures aren 't happening. Certainly at many, students are receiving tutor's papers, studying in the library and handing in their homework. This is certainly NOT a critique of the education factory. Only at the AG in Rouen, as far as I know, have students adopted a kind of critique of the system and their role in it - but this is adopted, and not adapted to fit modern conditions, from the situationists' “Poverty of Student Life” , the 40th anniversary of which falls this year. An incredible intellectual laziness! As Nietzsche said, “Better a debtor than pay with coin that does not bear our image” , or, in other words, “Better make your own mistakes than try to express yourself with other people's theories”. The economy, the world and students role within them had changed a little since even before these current students were even born. Although understandable, this

anti-student' discourse is primarily an expression of frustration with the current discourse, but without any real practical effect, partly because for students to oppose the University concretely is not financially possible. When I was a student in the early 70s I could get away without doing virtually any work for two and a half years (I virtually only did essays and seminar papers in the first 3 months). Nowadays in France, students still receive a fairly pitiful grant, but it gets withdrawn if you don't comply with the rules, which include weekly controls. Whilst it's good to hear of students trying , in however an ideological manner, to break with the dominant sterile focus on the CPE, or - at best - a limited critique of neo-liberalism, this use of a 40 year old critique doesn't get to grips with the dominant discourse - it remains an ideology competing with other ideologies. In 1968 only 12% of kids got the bac (roughly equivalent to A' levels) - nowadays it's 70% , and almost all of them go on to higher education. The expansion of this education sector means that many - perhaps most - students nowadays are not destined to be managers, to be professional ideologists, to have a clearly hierarchical authority role within the system. However, most hope to be, and that sterile stodgy Middle class consciousness dominates almost everything they talk about.

In the movement of '86 it was obvious that the students no longer criticised even the ideological content of the studies [3], let alone attack the university as an essential part of maintaining the division of labour. They had no desire to change society and were looking for "good jobs". They wanted more grants, more teachers, bigger classrooms, etc. At the same time, they didn't really want the Leftist parties and groups to manipulate them, generally adopting a vaguely reformist - but independant -leftism and creating "Co-ordinations" which were apparently autonomous from the parties and trade unions, but which certainly never criticised or challenged them. It was a kind of non-aligned "spontaneous" leftism operating within an assembly form which excluded outsiders (though now, many AGs allow outsiders).

Nowadays, the national student coordination meets each time in a different town and the number of delegates has doubled in size, from 200 to 400. On March 25th the leaders refused to meet Cruella de Villepin because he had ruled out withdrawing the CPE, which shows the strength of feeling , and confidence, of the base (in contrast, Trade Union bureaucrats have entered into talks with the government, which shows the weakness and lack of confidence of their base). The demands of the coordination have developed from the early days of this movement which concentrated exclusively on the CPE to a general amnesty for all the persons condemned in the November riots, the suppression of all laws favouring precarity including the CNE [4], etc. But they remain on the level of fairly safe ' demands without real practical consequences, and their leaders love to go on TV debates to reasonably ' argue their case against pro-CPE students - without even pointing out the material base of most of this support for the government: mostly wealthy parents, or parents who are going to employ them in their

petit bourgeois business. They usually, though with a few exceptions, moan about the casseurs' [5] (literally "breakers", a term used from '69 on to describe those who smashed shop windows on demos) to the media interviewers - which makes their demand for an amnesty for the November rioters a little hypocritical. They complain that the Trade Unions aren't supporting them properly, and some are now even asking them to call a "General Strike" which shows not merely a lack of critique of the function of trade unions [6], but a mentality which always wants to develop struggle through official organisations. Those who refer to May '68 forget, amongst other things, that May '68 was a wildcat general strike.

The fact that an AG is democratic doesn't mean much, since the vast majority are submissive to the dominant ideas (and are usually forced to submit to the dominant practice). As a "communiqué", supposedly from the Sorbonne occupation committee in exile[7] (though probably not really) said: "We are fighting against a law passed with a majority vote by a legitimate parliament. Our simple existence proves that the democratic principle of majority vote is questionable, it proves that the myth of the sovereignty of the general assembly can be usurped. It is part of our struggle to limit, as much as possible, the tyranny of the majority vote. All that space given to the general assemblies paralyses us and only serves to confer legitimacy on paper to a bunch of wannabe bureaucrats. The assemblies are neutralising all initiative by establishing a theatrical separation between the word and the act. Once the vote has been cast for a strike until the withdrawal of the law for equal opportunity, the general assemblies should become a space of endless debate, a space for sharing experiences, ideas, and desires, a place where we constitute our strength, not a scene of petty power struggles and intrigues for swaying the decision." [8]

Since the start of the strikes and occupations, this movement has spread - most notably to the lycées (for 16 - 18 year old secondary school students). And at the moment of writing, probably a majority of lycées in the towns, and possibly even in the countryside, are on strike (to speak of what I know, all but one of the lycées in the Hérault region in the South are on strike). Official Ministry of Education figures for lycée strikes gave just over 300 for March 20th, over 800 for the 21st, and gave up issuing figures on the 22nd. There are also loads of technical colleges on strike and blockaded. Amongst lycéens it seems a general radicalisation is taking place - anarchist slogans ("He who sows misery, reaps fury", "Police everywhere - justice nowhere", "General strike of all waged workers") are starting to become fairly commonplace.

To list everything that's happening is an impossible task, but it's enough to say that over the last 2 weeks the whole atmosphere has significantly changed in lots of towns, and nationally:

In loads of places, railway tracks and stations have been blocked for sometimes as long as 3

hours, and in some places the access roads to the towns have also been blocked.

There have been loads of attempts to occupy town halls, regional administrative buildings, and other places, leading to confrontations with the cops, whether they have been successful or not: most of the successful ones have led to quick expulsion by the cops.

There have been several riots, both small and large; in Paris on 18th March, whilst a well-reported riot was going on in the centre, a riot in the 20th arrondissement (one of the few working class boroughs of Paris) of over 300 youths lasting several hours was cheered on, whilst the gendarmes were jeered on, by the local populace from their windows.

An Ecole Supérieure ' in Paris was occupied for 4 days. This is an elite university for internationally reputed sociologists and psychologists who go on to advise governments throughout the world. It started out as a student occupation agreed to by the administration, but outsiders, disgusted at these students' future rôle, virtually forced the students out (at least, the fragile students couldn't bear to hear the insults aimed at their future privileged career in the world of reification). Rumour has it that because the directors of this place are supporters of the Socialist Party, the cops were ordered to hold back on kicking the occupiers out. Computers were stolen, and lots of trashing was done to the interior, including lots of revolutionary graffiti - « Death to democracy » was one that particularly shocked the administrators of this school for future advisers to democratic and dictatorial mass murderers. During the occupation, a poster was sellotaped to the fence of this Ecole Supérieure', which reads "My ballot paper is a paving stone but it doesn't fit in the ballot box". The regional paper Midi Libre has an article with the title Villepin wants "dialogue" above a photo of this poster, and below the photo the newspaper caption reads "Opening the discussion". For a mildly right-wing rag to publicise a radical critique with an ironic caption that could appear in a situationist or anarchist tract is a sign of the times. (Not that this paper is radicalised of course, but that it feels ok about being jokey, and maybe a bit recuperative, about anti-hierarchical violence, about the radical critique of dominant pseudo-dialogue; or maybe the caption-writer's a bit of a radical him/herself).

A demonstrator has been gravely injured by the cops, his life in the balance. This is just what Sarkozy, the hated Minister of the Interior and would-be President, didn't want: he'd given explicit instructions to the CRS not to do anything stupid, and to make a clear distinction between casseurs' and legitimate demonstrators'; he was afraid of a repeat of what happened in '86 when the death of an arab student forced the government to withdraw another particularly disliked law.

Kids from the banlieu have sometimes joined the movement, sometimes used the

demonstrations to attack the cops and wreck and loot stores, join in the wrecking of cars, all of which is fine (except to nicey nicey students and the dominant world) - but on March 23rd some sick anti-social elements showed how successful this society is in developing the war of each against all by attacking demonstrators to rob them of their wallets and mobiles and some fractured the skull of a young guy who bravely intervened to try to stop the violent thefts. They made no attempt to attack the cops, the cars or the shops - just went for demonstrators, particularly female ones, the easy targets. There are rumours that this is down to State manipulation [9]. There are a few clues to indicate this - they arrived all together - between 1000 and 2000, when usually such gangs arrive in their tens and twenties, 50-60 max.; and the plain clothes cops, noticeable because they never smile and tend to just look, keeping a bit separate, openly smiled when they saw this large gang arriving, and certainly didn't radio for back-up. Of course, whether this was deliberate secret government policy or not remains pure speculation. It could also be just the gang/business mentality which sometimes causes such gang/businesses to amalgamate, coupled with a spontaneous recognition by cops that this would help fuck up the movement. Anyway, the effect on those involved in the movement in Paris was very depressing, obviously.

Contrary to simplistic analyses' of the riots in November, such as Mouvement Communiste s which appears in English on the Prol-Position site, the gangs were opposed to the riots (even a State report said the estate gangs weren't involved) because having the estates even more saturated with cops wasn't exactly good for business - i.e. the drug trade. The attempt to muddy the waters by the crude amalgam technique - casseurs=banlieu rioters=gangs - is used by the government and traditional Leftists alike, though the Leftists often add fascist' to the list (as they have done ever since the 1930s). For ultra-leftists to contribute to the confusion, admittedly with a better, subtler, non-moralist content, is a bit pathetic. Sure, there was probably some participation in the riots by rank and file gang members, and these gangs breed a mentality that reduces people to objects, but psychotic events during the riots were far less than the media tried to make out, and are anyway part of the miserable daily life on the estates, riots or no riots. It might well be that, as in the US, people join gangs initially as a kind of protective insurance against rival gangs from neighbouring territory, rather than as a purely voluntary identifying with gang ethics or business goals, though the prospect of increased income from crime is also obviously a factor.

The movement is beginning, ever so slightly, to have a bit of an international effect :

In Auckland, New Zealand on March 21st, over 1,000 high school students walked out of class to protest against youth pay rates, whilst linking their protest to the events in France. The protest ended with some violence and a sit-down protest in a major intersection. Students from schools

including Auckland Girls Grammar, Selwyn College, Epsom Girls and Senior College went to a rally during school hours to demand equal pay with adults.

Germans have travelled to Paris to join in the confrontations and assemblies. [9b]

Not much further news so far - but watch this space.

However, the international ruling class is probably watching this movement far closer than the working class, and don't want to be taken by surprise like they were in May '68 - they obviously don't want a third international proletarian assault on class society happening to subvert their Midas touch (the reduction of everything to money, the attempt to ensure that nothing survives except the Economy). Consequently, it is unlikely that the government will withdraw this law, even though, in itself, it doesn't make a great deal of difference. On March 22nd de Villepin said, "With this law, there are three things which are impossible. The first, is its withdrawal, because that would be like saying that we capitulate to the logic of the ultimatums and preconditions. This, our electorate obviously does not want, and they would not forgive us for it. The second, is its suspension, because quite simply, that is contrary to our Constitution. And the third thing that is impossible, is the distortion of our law, because to lose the balance of the project would be to deprive it of any chance of success". Bernard Accoyer, the UMP governing party parliamentary president, said, "The UMP deputies are convinced that we must hold firm - the street cannot prevail over the law."

Like Thatcher, there's "no turning back". Although the law might be given the appearance of being modified, withdrawal would be a clear sign of weakness on the part of the State and would probably open up an even larger Pandora's box than is already happening. It would be a serious setback for their neo-liberal project. The movement has yet to anticipate how the French State can intelligently develop methods of defending its stupidity - there's an assumption that they're idiots. For the moment, the State is mainly hoping that workers don't take any initiative independent of the Unions, and that the movement of youth doesn't try to make any direct communication with workers. Some of the State sector workers might move, but without connecting to the private sector, the powers-that-be can probably sit it out, whilst doing a few manipulations here and there (which ones, I can't say, but, as speculated on before, using the kids of the banlieu is an obvious possibility). Time, money, the illusions in Unions and the media is on their side.

But the most useful policy' for the State are people's conservative habits. Apartheid reigns in France. It's very entrenched, even in radical moments: e.g. in '68 workers remained in their separate factories and wouldn't let radical students or anyone else in. And the rare attempts last

year to directly support the youths in the banlieues were mostly, though not always, met with bewilderment. The breakdown of these separations will surely scare conservative forces everywhere, including the conservative forces in peoples heads and lives: even on demos, most people generally remain in their familiar cliques, regardless of the label of these cliques/organisation/unions/ parties - and are often wary of speaking to someone they don't know already; in situations where something different happens, this certainly begins to break down, but so far the disruptions to normal daily life have been sporadic. Despite the impression given by the above list of events, the movement remains for most an external issue, not something that effects their daily lives most of the time, although for the minority making initiatives, this is obviously different.

The following is an account of some of the events over the last two weeks in Montpellier in the South of France:

Tuesday 14th March:

An attempt is made to occupy the main railway station, but the CRS prevent it, so the tramway is blocked instead. Tear gas and truncheoning used to unblock it. Then the Chambre de Commerce (admin building for private businesses) is occupied, an AG being held there by about 300 people, discussion going beyond the CPE, with some people calling the nature of work in this society into question. Discussion is restrained, confined to theoretical matters, because the cops are in there. The head cop is a Socialist Party sympathiser, and since this is a movement against a right-wing government, seems not in a hurry to kick them out, although the CRS are outside waiting. A majority vote is taken to continue the occupation, but suddenly someone shouts, "The CRS are putting their helmets on" implying they were about to charge, so everyone panics and rushes out. In fact, they hadn't put their helmets on, and there's speculation as to whether this was a manipulation on the part of someone who didn't like the direction the debate was going or whether he just lost his cool.

Thursday 16th March:

A friendly march in the middle of town, very large, I'd guess in excess of 15,000 (a lot for a fairly small town), though the papers next day put it at 6,000. Certainly it seemed bigger than the Iraq war demo 3 years ago, which everyone agreed had been massive. Lots of lycee and Technical College students. Warm weather, warm atmosphere. I meet some new people. The road to the

station is blocked by a line of CRS police vans, in front of which is a small pro-CPE demo of about 10 - 15 people, in front of them there's a line of CRS on foot, and in front of them a double line of demonstration stewards preventing a confrontation. Most of the demonstrators are not up for a confrontation, but some chuck eggs, cans, fairly light things at the pro-CPE demo. The stewards, who are mainly students [10], are urging demonstrators to continue quickly past - they're really enthusiastic about giving orders. Someone ironically shouts "Be submissive! Do as you're told!" One of the stewards I know personally - he's the son of anarchist friends: I shout angrily at him, "Have you got no shame? How can you protect your enemies?" He looks upset. Lycee and technical college students hold a sit-down meeting in the big square in the centre of town, lots of different youths getting up to speak, though nothing beyond youth precarity is talked about. A cry goes out - "To the station!", echoed by a 16 year old girl from my village, who says she wants to occupy the railway tracks. Having given her a few English lessons a year or so before, I had no idea she was rebellious. Funny how you don't know people until there's a situation like this - and perhaps people don't really begin to know themselves until there's a situation like this. The CRS are guarding the station, and it's virtually impossible to go in as a large force - only in ones and twos, and without banners etc. The electronic announcement at the station warns passengers that there might be interruptions to services due to demonstrators (the next day, the state rail company said that day there'd been 12 occupations of railway tracks throughout the country; the chances are that there had been more).

People return to the main square, where already people are drifting off towards the Corum Theatre in order to occupy it. Some think the call to go to the station was a manipulation so as to have time for the cops to get to the Corum. Outside it, a French flag is partly burned (apparently it was wet, for some reason). I see the guy I knew who'd been a demo steward protecting the pro-CPE demonstrators three hours earlier, the son of anarchist friends, and he waves me over, saying, "What I did earlier back there was stupid, really stupid, but I was the first to get truncheoned by the cops here, trying to get into the Corum". If I was religious, I'd call it 'redemption', but let's just call it 'radicalisation': sometimes radicalisation only takes a few hours. There's blood on the paving stones - the cops had been heavy getting people out, but 20 people were still inside, and outside there were pushes and shoves against the doors, but many young students complained about this, calling it "violent". There was even a door open, with just one CRS inside, on the other side of it - and with anything between 500 and 1000 people outside, the demonstration could easily have got in, and maybe even held an AG, but the will wasn't there. I got in through this door, and very very slowly, casually, with a benign smile on my face, walked past the CRS and approached the demonstrators sitting and standing around, some of whom I knew. Apparently a CRS truncheon had been nicked. A student demonstrator, who had nothing to do with this liberation of the tonfa (Japanese-style truncheon with a handle at 90° to it, making it easier to control), had been arrested and the demonstrators refused to

leave until he'd been freed. The cops, in control of the situation, played a cool liberal game, leaving it to a street-cred Socialist Party sympathiser, to try to convince the demonstrators to leave. When someone took off the plastic chain of an unprotected door to the outside, to try and open it, the cops quickly moved to prevent outside demonstrators moving in, but only complaining to this guy in a hurt indignant tone, "What did you do that for?". They're not always the utter fascists they used to be: when they know things won't get out of hand, they can rely on their sensitivity training ' to play the soft cops. After 40 minutes of remaining put, the demonstrators inside left having been assured that the guy arrested was being released immediately, that he 'd already been charged (with what, I never found out). The evening continued with everyone going off to discuss the day's events, and the possibility of getting another occupation together on the Saturday, 2 days later.

Saturday 18th March:

I arrived in Montpellier late - the demo seemed a lot smaller than just 2 days before, partly because there were a lot less lycéens. The demo was like the weather - a lot colder than the one on the warm Thursday just 2 days before. It could have been the same demo as 2 or 3 years ago, and the planned action didn't happen (an occupation to have a general assembly) - mainly because those who had been into it the previous day were nowhere around. I bumped into Americans for Peace and Justice, who had a stand outside the Polygone (a big indoor shopping centre right in the centre of Montpellier) - doing their bit about the war, living in a bubble separate from the movement in France (they had a homemade "spin machine", where you turn a handle and various quotes from Bush, a picture of a torture victim, a quote from Amnesty International and a photo of Bush himself spin round a lot of work for a mildly funny joke, but I suppose it was mainly to attract the attention of passers-by).

A van of CRS passed - so I followed it to the outside of the Polygone. There had been an attempt to occupy the Town Hall, with 10 or 20 people getting in before they'd been evicted. Apparently half the demo had been led away by the CGT to the Regional Town Hall, which is so far away from the main demo area that the cops had plenty of time to stop an occupation attempt. Gesture politics. More importantly, it split the demo in two (CGT workers separated from youth, mainly). Which was why the demo had seemed small.

I saw a Polygon security guy talking to the CRS outside, and followed him inside, talking agitatedly into his walkie talkie , running past the shops in the Polygone. There was a massive crowd amongst the regular shoppers. 2 out of 3 shops had their grills down. And people in the Polygone were shouting and chanting and singing, winding up the security people with slogans "

Police everywhere - Justice Nowhere!", "Those who reap misery, sow fury", "General strike of all the waged workers", standard anarchist stuff here, but quite invigorating in the context of this indoor shopping precinct. No damage to anyone or anything, people talking in a generally friendly manner. Most shops had pulled down the shutters, but not all and the cafés were still functioning. Some people started banging out a rhythm on the shutters, which harmonised with the chants. Someone accidentally knocked over a cafe chair, and suddenly the security guards threw a chair at someone and cut open his head, and then continued throwing chairs and tables even though there were quite a few shoppers amongst the crowd, kids, handicapped, etc; immediately after this a cop pulls out a big gun and fires tear gas - this with tourists etc around, and INSIDE. So that's what they mean by Security' (a word issued by the Ministry of Truth). A guy at the wide open Chinese restaurant says, "Waiter - I know I ordered onions with my chop suey but this is ridiculous" (not). Everyone panics, running outside, as the CRS start charging (I get a slight whiff of tear gas). Then outside everyone starts running as the CRS rush out, they're hitting the backs of legs, and push a guy right next to me holding a trucheon to his throat; they scream "run...run", and most people do, but I just say in an impeccable BBC accent "I'm just doing my shopping here", and limp away, pretending I've got a bad foot (it seemed best to do that, because they were more vicious towards those who were running).

They close the Polygone, with a line of about 10 CRS, someone chucks a bottle at the glass front, and then they charge, the same guy pointing the gun at everyone, whilst they make an arrest behind him. People say the gun is for a "flash ball", a kind of plastic bullet, but it looked exactly the same as the tear gas gun. My first experience of the CRS. Must recommend them to my friends in England. Students are genuinely shocked by the tear gas. The local paper next day has a photo of security guards holding chairs, but just says there was an exchange of missiles (not true - it was only on their side, at least inside the Polygone) and doesn't mention the tear gas. Heard some time later that shop assistants and keepers had been told that the resort to tear gas was made to combat casseurs, which even if it had been true would hardly make sense. But then spectators will swallow and justify any old bullshit, even if it has no logic other than numbing themselves to the callousness of the unjustifiable.[11]
Monday, 20th March:

A lot of semi-situ graffiti at the University of Paul Valery here:

When property doesn't exist, neither will theft.

I don't know what I want, but I know how to get it.

I don't want to die before I've lived

To negotiate is to win a bit - and to capitulate a lot.

The law is unjust - to obey it is a crime.

Youth makes the great dreams of beautiful revolutions completely possible.

"The Republic is a whore" - Plato

"I come - therefore I am" - Descartes

"Pass the salt" - Sartre

What a beautiful life we have when we live the life we want

Dictatorship is "Shut your gob!", democracy is to endlessly chat

To be a security guard is filthy work

(and next to the above: "But is there such a thing as clean work?")

Kill art so as to live everyday.

Students - commit suicide! (now!)

And on an A3 sized coloured photocopy of an old painting, two women with speech bubbles:

"The product of work stands above us as a foreign being, as a power independent of the producer"

"What is stolen during worktime cannot be re-discovered in submission to its result" [12]

Most of the University of Paul Valery has been on strike for some 6 weeks, with doors blockaded and certain areas occupied 24 hours a day. There are notable exceptions, however - both the art department - "Beaux Arts" and "Law"[13], for instance, have not joined the strike, which perhaps indicates how both support this crap world. Why these sections haven't been attacked by the more militant students is probably due simply to a lethargic pacifism on the part of most of the students. But they have resisted attempts to manipulate an end to the occupation by the University authorities[14], and hold open General Assemblies, in which anyone who is present may vote, outsiders as well as students. This does not necessarily mean the students have started to make a criticism of the function of the University. But making a General Assembly, and its voting rights, open to everyone is not a bad start to breaking down separations. Of course, we should judge such assemblies also on the content of what is said and done, not just on the form.

The only General Assembly I went to was very short, because there was a call for an immediate demonstration for the guy who'd been arrested at the Corum Theatre a few days before, with descriptions of how the cops had been heavy (exaggerated), and descriptions of the tear gassing of the Polygon (not exaggerated). I hadn't realised on Thursday that the cops offered to exchange the guy arrested for the truncheon that was stolen: he was a hostage, the truncheon the ransom. The call was for a peaceful demo outside the large "Hotel de la Police", Montpellier's main, and massive, police station. But it was emphasised that the call for a peaceful demo came from the family of the guy arrested, who didn't want anything to harm his case. And that this was a tactical question, not necessarily an expression of pacifist ideology. "We cannot make

an equivalent of people fighting back with stones against an armed force, with shields and truncheons and gas” said one guy, adding, to loud cheers from a majority of the amphitheatre, “Capitalism kills thousands every day” . The meeting dissolved, people walked off to the tramway in the pouring rain, got on several trams (not enough space in just one), didn't pay the fare (and influenced other passengers squeezing in at the various stops not to pay), and got off for a friendly demo, though sadly constrained within the limits demanded of the parents of the arrested guy, who'd called for non-political slogans and no political songs or chants (the only songs were kids songs, without any change in wording).

Yesterday, according to the local media, dozens of lycées were on strike in the department of Hérault (last year, very little happened in Hérault against the Fillon law, when it was an immediate issue), so I imagine similar things are happening round the country that we don't hear about. The TV talks mainly of Paris - a guy on the Saturday demo in a coma after the cops trampled over him - took them 2 days to broadcast that one; a riot during the day (Monday) outside a lycée in a suburb of Paris involved in the riots of November.

Wednesday 22nd March:

Sports students invaded the University admin building through the windows and held a sit-in/sing-in against the fact that there've been cuts in the number of sports teacher jobs in the secondary schools - should we be supporting these future fascists? In November, on the outskirts of Paris, 10 year old schoolkids were told that there'd be no more gym classes for some time because rioters had burned down the gym[15]. The whole class cheered - well-relieved that they didn't have to face that sadistic bully for some time. Sports teachers don't change, whatever the epoch.

A demo of students and others outside the prefecture (regional admin HQ) clearly stated that the movement had gone beyond the issue of the CPE (first employment contract) and verbally attacked Sarkozy for all his repressive measures, especially including those against kids as young as 3 (they want to define kids as potential delinquents).

A demo against the bosses organisation MEDEF (equivalent of CBI) invaded their building, where they were discussing ways of giving advice to labour lawyers on how to deal with the CPE, and peacefully removed all the furniture into the street, where people proceeded to sit on the armchairs and hold a discussion.

Not bad for one day in one town, when no marches took place.

In Marseille there's a total strike of the lycées.

Yesterday, in Clermont-Hérault (about an hour's drive from Montpellier) a lycee on strike held a demo outside a college (for 11 - 15 yr olds) to try to get them to come out on strike. Some 14 and 15 year olds came out for an hour or so. The media is openly talking about a social crisis and there's going to be a semi-general strike next Tuesday 28th but the Unions are calling it "an inter-professional day of strikes and action", not just because General Strike' sounds too radical, but also because they're not calling all their members out. They too have learnt from the last 38 years, and are playing a modern version of their usual 2-faced game - expressing sympathy for students and youth (but not if they're casseurs of course), but keeping them very much separate.

Thursday, 23rd March:

All but one lycée in Montpellier is on strike; at one of them, a tree is used to block the door.

At the end of a big demo - about 10,000 - there's an attempt to storm the big Virgin record store, but the doors are quickly shut; the same happens at MacDonalds, with one or two arrests. Then there's a demo outside the police station near the Polygone, then another confrontation at Monoprix opposite MacDonalds, and another confrontation, involving at least 150 (according to the local rag) at the main station. Apparently cops in plain clothes were the first to throw things at the various targets, provoking others to join in, so as to enable arrests. Local TV news has been instructed not to show tapes of the plain clothes cops throwing stuff.[16]

A day to day account of the events in English is available on: libcom.org

The following are translations of 2 leaflets:

Untitled

If this movement interest us it's because of what it could become, but not especially because of what, up till now, it is.

The best things that are happening are: the blockades of railway tracks; the few attacks on Town Halls and Prefectures' (regional administrative headquarters); the attacks on the cops; the fact that, even for limited reasons, two-thirds of the factories for the Middle Class (the universities) aren't functioning; and the possibility that secondary school students are going to

re-launch their fight against the Fillon law. But it's very far from May '68, and the international crisis that the movement 38 years ago provoked. It's far from a practical critique of the commodity, of the economy (even in '68 there was a big separation between young radicals and the workers in their factories). The minority of students with integrity can make a contribution against all the University bullshit, but they haven't yet done it.

If the students don't try to communicate directly with workers (and not through the mediation of the workers' cops - the unions), and to see that the precarity that awaits them is already there for the large majority of the poor and that a movement against neo-liberalism must include them, it's because the vast majority of students want to have a privileged situation in this world that's destroying itself, want to have a hierarchical relation above the poor. The fact that, probably in 15 years more or less, the majority of current students will be impoverished in their work, doesn't penetrate their middle class consciousness. (March 16th 2006)

CONTESTATION OF MISERY OR MISERY OF CONTESTATION

The question of violence in demonstrations is always posed. It's about time that we reflected on the significance of a violent act in the context of struggle, in a situation of a power struggle. Demonstrators have never been so disciplined as in our epoch. This acceptance of "orderly, thus respectable" demonstrations is no longer made by tight police supervision which dissuades urges from being expressed: the police are present in our heads.

They've ended up making us internalise this belief in the necessity of having to appear respectable in the eyes of the cameras and of "public opinion". And if there are still "casseurs" who have infiltrated the demos, who of course aren't there just to break things or to provoke confrontation, the supreme weapon of orderly revolt is unleashed: a demo steward who co-operates with the police, who plans the route of the demo with them, predicting the "risks of things getting out of hand", self-proclaiming themselves "responsible" as against the "irresponsible", respectable against those who are unrespectful, legitimate as against those who have no legitimacy whatsoever. But let's open our eyes! Who wants to play the media game again and again, to focus on the idyllic image of reasonable dignified youth they want to impose on us and where we end up by personifying the exemplary "good child" in these demonstrations that would like to be peaceful? What is dignity in a world where nothing is dignified? They say to the homeless, to those who are precarious, to angry youth, to the forgotten ones on the estates, to housewives, to those who've been sacked, to everyone who's been sacrificed to flexibility - "Don't get angry, at least not too angry, keep patient, stay calm, choose the voice of

rationality and moderation, stay dignified, even when it's a question of your social death, of your economic survival, of your political disillusion, be dignified, and don't show solidarity with those people who de-legitimise your movement, who want to steal your dignity". But for how long must we play this smelly little game? We have nothing to lose, not even this dignity, which is nothing but an invented fiction maintained to convince us that we have to hold on to something in this generalised decay. So let's reject this moralistic discourse which pollutes our revolt, let's refuse to delegate the care with which a demonstration steward protects us from our own fury. Let's banish from our vocabulary the terms "casseurs" and "irresponsible" which we apply to ourselves, and which in fact only help neutralise our insubordination towards authority. To be responsible is to be lucid, is to refuse to be scared of confrontation, since we want a power struggle without weakness and without compromise.

...MISERY OF CONTESTATION

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POSTSCRIPT 1 added on 12/4/06:

Initial reaction to the withdrawal of the CPE:

Some banalities about the withdrawal of the CPE

When a rabid dog is attacked and retreats into a corner and whimpers it's too early to call the attack a victory'. Rabid dogs must be shot (this is an analogy here, not an incitement to terrorism, which is clearly counter-revolutionary - "you can't blow up a social relationship", as the title of an interesting anarchist pamphlet said in the 1970s).

Though the movement has encouraged and developed the beginnings of a new generation of radical youth, and given those who recognise themselves in such a movement a breathing space, the withdrawal of the CPE has also created a breathing space for the world ruling class, and the French one in particular. It's a victory, but so was the retreat of Poll tax, and that was a short-lived victory', which led to the council tax - council tax was a partial victory insofar as those on benefits and other low income poor didn't have to pay. But the fixture on a single issue gave the ruling class the chance to ditch their leader (Thatcher) and give some semblance of change (Major, and then, particularly, Blair) (though the comparison is problematic because of the very different French situation, e.g. the retreat of Poll tax, and Thatcher's resignation, was over 6

months after the big riots; and refusing poll tax was, except for the few imprisoned for not paying, essentially passive - all you had to do was not pay, and maybe give a false name and address, where possible - but this has been a rapidly developing active movement). It's clearly a clever tactical retreat. For one thing, it sorts the more radical sections of the struggle out from the more moderate ones, to turn each against one another, and to make the radical ones stand out more clearly - e.g. it's hard for cops to go into schools, or wade into demos, etc., if half those involved are moderate opponents of this or that law. Today, at Paul Valery Uni in Montpellier barricades are going up as the cops are threatening to invade. A Uni spokesman said, revealingly, something like "This was a movement against the CPE, which has been withdrawn, and now they want to end neo-liberalism, but they shouldn't confuse the two". A student spoke overtly about opposing "THEIR society", posing this against simply "society". Clearly, the crisis is not over yet, despite the wishes of all the forces protecting this sick world.

The government has been faced with a massive movement that threatened to become a revolutionary crisis - and still has the chance of doing so in the short to medium term, if workers start to move more. Cornered, it had two choices: to dig in and refuse to budge in the belief that that was the only way to keep the lid on the Pandora's box of subversion spreading mainly amongst youth in this country. Or to pretend to retreat, to allow its apparent critics - the PS, the unions, the would-be radical politicians of the student unions, the church, the heads of the Universities, etc. to declare a victory and to disarm and confuse the movement. It finally chose the latter, under the pressure of the Unions and the left wing of capital. The State, the Unions, the political parties and the media are now declaring the end of the crisis hoping that such a declaration will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The ideology of democracy, not explicitly contested by the vast majority of those who have taken part in this movement, even by the majority of those who took original initiatives, is being used to herd people into the isolation and individualism of the ballot box - but this ideology is now being practically contested. In two faculties at Montpellier University (Paul Valery and the Faculty of Science), General Assemblies having voted to maintain the blockades, are boycotting a secret ballot organised by the Uni authorities to lift the blockade. The vast majority of students haven't even participated in the assemblies or blockades, which were part of the reasons for the withdrawal of this new contract law: their passivity wants to claim the victory of the withdrawal of the CPE as a pretext to accept the continuation of the neo-liberal project (Sarkozy said yesterday that France must push its way into the Brave New neo-liberal World; the only surprise is he didn't wait a bit to say it). They wanted a free ride on the backs of the movement, and now that that movement has won', their passivity insures that they are being ridden by the powers-that-be. They want secret ballots because that's one way of crushing open discussion, which has gone from a situation of formal democracy to a "democracy of content" (Josef

Weber): direct mass decision making and dialogue armed with barricades. This is quite different from the situation at one lycée round Montpellier, where a headmaster has been cleverly recuperative: he 's set aside a specific room for free debates ', whilst normal lessons are resumed. But a critique of exams and of the totality of the education system has yet to appear (in French, see "Dans le ventre de l'ogre" and, a very different text in English, see "Education, Stupefification, Commodification," for a critique of education).

Throughout the crisis, the workers, at least in their work situation, have so far hardly asserted any initiatives independent of the one-day strikes organised by the Union cops. It was the fear that this might change which has been one of the main reasons for the government's retreat. For example, on April 4th, electricity workers sabotaged the power supply to the Montpellier town hall and the Polygone shopping centre: electricity was cut for at least half an hour [note added in May: this turned out not to have been sabotage, which had been pure speculation on the part of Midi-Libre, the main regional paper of the South]. Or on April 8th, Rennes postal workers took short strike action in solidarity with blockading youths. The sorting office had been violently evacuated by the cops earlier, having been occupied since 9.30pm by about sixty anti-CPE militants. Ten demonstrators took refuge in the sorting office under the protection of paid workiers who, shocked by the cop violence, did not resume work. The young people lit fires of pallets in front of the entrance of the center, paralysing the activity of the site which manages the mail of the department of Ille-and-Vilaine and of a dozen departments in and around Brittany. I suspect that it was the low level union reps who persuaded the workers to return to work (though some of these low level ones have some integrity, despite their role, and sometimes don 't play it). A strike, begun just before Chirac 's withdrawal of the CPE, in Perpignan of firemen at the airport against new Chambre de Commerce proposals for flexible work contracts, involving such things as firemen being used as baggage handlers, has ended with the beginnings of negotiations. At the Montpellier hospitals a strike is threatening over the threat to sack 300 workers.

Unions are an essential part of keeping the lid on the Pandoras box of repressed desires and repressed rage. In the past weeks, the Union bureaucrats have often done their best to assure that all independent initiative was reported to the bosses. As part of the capitalist racket, the function of Unions is to control the working class and to assert their own capitalist interests by trying to keep unemployment down since they depend on union dues for their own massive investments and relatively well-off incomes: so they have to play the two-faced game of opposing some bosses, whilst acting like bosses themselves. Their abject failure to do anything against the CNE so far, which is worse than the CPE, says something about what they mean by victory' (which is not say, depending on the national mood for a fight, that they won't be pushed into doing something). This is not to say they won't, but their hierarchical mentality means they

have to always be in copntrol, and so dampen everything down into something which inevitably demoralises and almost invariably leads to defeat.

If the State retreats it's up to us to advance...

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POSTSCRIPT 2 added on 12/4/06:

Further news from Montpellier:

27/3/06: 150 stink bombs dropped in the Polygone shopping precinct as some kind of revenge for the tear gas and flashball of just over a week before.

2/4/06: a demo for those imprisoned outside the big Maguelone prison where Bove and Riesel had been banged up, smashed some of the CCTV cameras with stones - with gendarmes looking on but making no arrests.

4/4/06: again, about 40 to 50 thousand people demonstrate in Montpellier (between 15 and 20% of greater Montp. area). Graffiti against work and against democracy, against the temp agencies, against prisons etc. put up during the demo. Busy road intersection blocked for half hour towards evening, CRS called and became threatening, 3 or 4 arrests, all released without charge.

5/4/06 the governing party offices were sacked in Montpellier (and elsewhere as well, but I'm not sure if they were on the same day).

6/4/06: a biggish demo outside the courtroom where a guy charged with incitement to riot was appearing. A big banner facing the courtroom and the line of cops behind their large grills was put up, saying to the cops and the courtroom "Down with the Security' State" (not quite sure how to translate "securitaire" because no English equivalent), but on the other side facing the demo whilst the cops were behind their fencing, a notice about the cops: "Warning: Do Not Feed the Animals. Thank You - The Management". Cops didn't notice, as they only had a one-sided view, which is implicit in their social function.

7/4/06: Attempt to block the railway tracks at Montpellier, with tv cameras filming the cops

beating people back, commentary fairly anti-cop (unusual). In Paris, heard of a gang of banlieue kids on a demo, some of whom tried to steal money, mobiles etc, but were pulled off by the majority of banlieue kids who told them they were well out of order, and then they joined with students and other kids in attacking various businesses. No date for this, but within last week.

Footnotes

1. The CPE is clearly a way of making the young precarious both inside the company (to accept the bosses discipline, not to strike, to accept dangerous working conditions, to work very quickly, etc.) and outside the company (it will be difficult during 2 years to leave his/her parents, probably impossible to rent a room or a flat, virtually impossible to get a bank loan, etc). Nevertheless, many older workers have precarious short-term job contracts covered by fairly old laws - and are often paid with several months delay.

2. The Ministry of Education statistics are a lot lower, surprise surprise. During the second week of March, I managed to watch 2 national news programmes on the movement, because on TF1 the item was relegated to third place, considered less newsworthy than the incessantly repeated Asian bird flu horror shock (basically, an agro-business-led manipulation). Tele 2 gave the Ministry of Education figures as 30 unis on strike (or partly), whilst adding media figures of 40 and Student Union figures of 46. When, after 7 minutes, I switched to TF1, owned by Sarkozy's brother-in-law, the Ministry of Education figures had suddenly dropped to 18. 7 minutes might be a long time in the history of political struggle, but for 12 universities to stop their strike all round about 8 in the evening should make the Guinness Book of Records (you'd think they'd co-ordinate their bullshit better). Although we've got used to over-estimates of numbers by demonstration organisers, the figure of about 80% of universities currently on strike &/or on semi-strike is almost certainly pretty accurate, and might even be an under-estimate (because I haven't kept up with the latest figures).

3. In 1987 I helped write with some others, referring to this movement, "The real critique of the university/college etc. tends to come from without. Primarily by rebels, employed or unemployed, who have either left college years ago or have never been. ..There are still a few, albeit very few, who have no ambitions in the system, who reject competitive individualism, who have no intention of being future authorities of various kinds and who go beyond good intentions and put their life where their mouth is. Even though the ever-tightening constraints of the economy have made the possibility of subversive anti-students seem irrelevant, even archaic, there are still isolated rebels in the universities... However, most students only see through their mis-education once they've left, once they've lost the carrot of a career and find themselves structurally within the proletariat, the former students who commit the one necessary suicide

and slowly but surely have seen their educational interlude, whether in the realm of art, literature, science, sociology, psychology, teaching or whatever, as a complete and utter con (that is, when they're not bitter and fucked up about having had to take a lowlier job than they feel entitled to). Practically though, this realisation comes too late: they're mostly impotent to do anything about it in the sense of having immediate access to wrecking the generally useless junk in the library, disrupting lectures, deflowering the art treasures, desecrating the temples of ideology, etc... There's so many individuals like this, but, by and large, they're isolated from one another in their private, but very right, conclusions.” (“France Goes Off The Rails”, April 1987)

4. CNE is a law for all workers in companies employing less than 20, not just for under 26 yr olds: it makes it easier to sack workers in new jobs, but it's not as indiscriminate as the proposed CPE - workers can challenge the sacking, and bosses have to defend it with reasons. But this area of reason' has yet to be seriously clarified by the courts.

5. It's worth reflecting on how the internalisation of dominant ideology has developed over the last 12 years by pointing out how youth violently, and successfully, combatted a law in 1994 designed to reduce the minimum wage for under-26-year-olds to 80% of the minimum of what older people were getting, with lots of young rioters shouting “We are all casseurs!”. The law was withdrawn: the street had won a temporary victory.

6. The unions want to have a “true discussion” with the government. They're asking the government to finance a permanent training fund for the entire life of any particular wage-earner. Their model is flex-security like in Denmark or Sweden. Obviously they don't criticize flexibility which to them is “imposed by present globalization” but they want the State to create a security net for all wage-earners from their first to their last job. They also want the State to give subsidies (or tax advantages) to the companies which will hire young people with no qualification (20 % of the youth) for a CDI (Contrat à durée indéterminée, Undetermined duration contract) as opposed to the CDD (Limited duration contract). Until now a boss (including the State) was not allowed to give more than 3 successive CDD's to an employee and risked a fine if he did. As the government did not discuss with the wage-earners and student unions before presenting the law about the CPE, its attitude pushed the most moderate trade unions (CFDT, CFTC) to unite with the most “radical unions” - the CGT, FO, UNSA, Groupe des Dix which includes the Sud trade unions (see text on this site on the movement of 1995-6), which sometimes have a radical language. Their traditional ties either with the CP (CGT), either with the Far Left (Groupe des Dix) or their demagogy (FO) lead them to call for

one-day strike actions more often than the CFDT and CFTC (Christian moderate trade unions; the CFDT is linked to the Socialist Party) which are always complaining that the government, modelled on Thatcher, does not discuss with them. Now the ever-smiling de Villepin, constantly criticised for his personality - his aristocratic authoritarianism, is offering to talk to them, and doubtless they hope to be recognised by him as an essential part of de-railing the social crisis. He has reasons for maintaining his smile.

7. In the first week of March, the Sorbonne, unjustified symbol of May '68, was occupied for 3 days before being evicted after some people threw things at the cops from windows, and has been protected by cops ever since, despite often violent confrontations with them outside the buildings.

8. See our critique of the fetishism of the assembly form in our text on the anti-globalisation movement "You Make Plans - We Make History".

9. One can guess the possibility that this is a similar scenario to one that happened during the lycee movement of last year. On March 8th 2005 a well-publicised attack on the school students took place on the Paris demo - not by the cops but by youths from the estates on the periphery of Paris. The CRS and the other cops watched passively as mobile phones, money, etc. were stolen from groups of students by gangs of "casseurs". In the past those from the estates would often go on demos just to attack the shops and businesses. Lefties usually said that they were police provocateurs, almost as a ritual denunciation. But this time they left the shops unharmed and attacked the demonstrators, some being hospitalised. Many thought they had been manipulated, and not just traditional Leftists. The fact that they all gathered at one point when they belonged to different gangs, that they had a clear plan to divide the demonstration in two, which they did, and that they were directed by 20 or so older, tough Mafia-looking types, who seemed to be co-ordinating the attacks, made the Left's cry of wolf seem genuine this time. On the other hand, the fact that they were open to such a manipulation is indicative of the decomposition of the times. The effect of these attacks was that on the next demo turnout was down to about 25% of the previous numbers, plus they were well stewarded by Union bureaucrats and surrounded by masses of cops. Sarkozy, after the attacks by banlieue kids on March 23rd, has offered to protect the demonstrators. Knowing that National Front fascists were deliberately allowed through police lines so as to attack demonstrators in Toulouse and Paris in mid-March, we trust that most demonstrators are not so stupid as to accept this manipulation at face value.

9b. A friend writes from Greece: "It is in the front pages of almost all the daily newspapers. I have to tell you that the events in Paris had a great impact in Greece. Initially the Greek industrialists had proposed measures similar to the ones that the French government promoted. After the big demonstrations in Paris and a general strike here on March 15, the government rejected their proposals and even stepped back from the reforms it had started in the public sector."

10. On Paris demos, functionaries of the Police Union, students, CGT and F.O. union bureaucrats - all perform the role of stewards alongside one another.

11:Added Mar 27:

Toulouse Indymedia had a blog, backed up by a few other people (maybe mates of the guy who wrote it), that a guy had chucked a glass at one of the shops whose shutters had not been pulled down, that that had been the pretext for the security guards fighting, and the guy who'd done it was shortly afterwards seen to be a cop, with a cop armband on him. The rest of the blog was about how brutal the cops had been. In fact, they weren't THAT brutal. And nobody I know, nor anyone they know, had seen this attack on the shop. It is vaguely possible that it happened, but probably it was just a classic desire to exaggerate how nasty the cops are (which they obviously can be when the situation demands it, and often when it doesn't). Excessively inflating our victim status doesn't help - the truth is sufficient: lies and rumours just breed cynicism, a suspicion towards any and everything that's said about a situation. Rumour's a strange force, expressing what people want to believe. A healthy critical scepticism - enquiring minds attempting to check everything - is the only force we have against it at the moment, as it is against the dominant lies

12. Other graffiti seen, March 27th:

Demos are to the State what a football match is to the TV spectator - a good distraction from a true power struggle: General strike!

Burn money - you'll be all the richer!

Media - Piss Off!

Over a piece of scrubbed out graffiti: Why is it always my graffiti they clean off the walls?

There 's also been the growth of fascist graffiti at Paul Valery. Though the University campus is covered with graffiti, much of it written by outsiders, the rest of the town has little interesting stuff, mainly just the tags. In this society, the gym is to the body, what art galleries are to the imagination; just as we are separated from an evolving creativity so are we separated from any organic development of our bodies. Exercise has to be increasingly relegated to a separate sphere, like everything else in this society.

13. Added Mar 27th:

The Law faculty includes Political Science students, who traditionally have been more radical. In fact, round about mid-March there was a vote during an AG for a strike, with a 2:1 majority, about 400 students present. This infuriated the traditionally right-wing law students, who prevented a blockade and organised another AG, where they refused to allow outsiders to speak or vote. An almost violent (let's say heated') confrontation between striking students and non-striking students ensued, and the strike was officially ' called off, though many individual students at that Faculty are on strike, though without blockades.

14: Many University authorities claim to oppose the CPE; this is partly because they don't want to have problems with their students, partly because it's causing such disruption (symptomatic of this is talk of putting off exams until after the summer) and partly because they genuinely oppose it. But the head of Montpellier University has openly supported it. This is one reason why even student union reps at Paul Valery have quite a radical rhetoric; e.g. one went on TV to call for a General Strike. But none support the casseurs.

15: In this society, the gym is to the body, what art galleries are to the imagination; just as we are separated from an evolving creativity so are we separated from any organic development of our bodies. Exercise has to be increasingly relegated to a separate sphere, like everything else in this society.

16: March 23rd: More information about this day:

Apparently part of the demo went to the Prefecture, then ran off to Virgin to have an AG - 40 people actually got in. The CRS outside attacked individuals with tear gas sprayed in their face. Some then ran off to MacDonalds to create chaos, some getting in, with one guy arrested

outside. Otherwise, the description is more or less as described above, the cops in plain clothes' dressed to look pretty much like standard anarcho-type demonstrators. The cops were quite heavy, and two people arrested have received, 4 days later, with a court-appointed "defence" lawyer and no right to put off the trial so as to prepare a proper defence, got 2 months inside, one for just throwing a can. Another guy's been arrested for "incitement to riot", an offence which potentially could land him inside for a long time.

