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Just Short of the “Conscious Leap”: Ernest Mandel in 1968 - Berlin and Paris

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Jan Willem Stutje describes Ernest Mandel’s experiences in Berlin with Rudi Dutschke and on the barricades in Paris during 1968.

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Tariq Ali, Alain Krivine, and Ernest Madnel (l-r).

Jan Willem Stutje’s Ernest Mandel: A Rebel’s Dream Deferred [1], published by Verso in a translation by Christopher Beck and Peter Drucker in 2009, is the first biography of the great Belgian intellectual and militant of the Fourth International.

Below, we present an excerpt from the book which details Mandel’s experiences during 1968 in Berlin and Paris.

On 9 October 1967, the world learned of the murder of Ernesto Che Guevara. Convinced that guerrilla warfare was the only way to victory, he had gone to join the Bolivian struggle. His body was found mutilated in a remote village. This was the death of a revolutionary, a modern-day warrior chief. The left was in mourning; poets wrote elegies, laments that ended with calls to rebellion. In an interview with Gerhard Horst (pseudonym of André Gorz), an editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, Mandel spoke of “a severe shock, all the more as I regarded him as a personal friend.” In *La Gauche* he mourned “a great friend, an exemplary comrade, a heroic militant.” On the Boulevard St-Michel in Paris and Berlin’s Kurfürstendamm, in London and Milan people shouted: “Che, Che, Gue-va-ra!” The chopped syllables formed a battle cry against the established order. Neither Moscow nor Beijing had expressed even the most grudging sympathy. In openly showing their regret the Italian and French Communist parties proved they still possessed a little autonomy.

Mandel's sympathizers in the French Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR), a radical group founded in 1966 in a split from the Union of Communist Students, refused to accept his death. "Che was our best antidote to the Maoist mystique," Daniel Bensaïd recalled. In the Latin Quarter of Paris, the Mutualité, temple of the French workers' movement, was full to overflowing. Mandel spoke alongside Maurice Nadeau, just back from Havana, and Janette "The Cuban" Habel. He portrayed Che as he had come to know him in 1964. Emotion crested as those present softly hummed "The Song of the Martyrs," the mourning march from the 1905 Russian Revolution, before launching into, "You have fallen for all those who hunger" and belting out the chorus, "But the hour will sound, and the people conquer . . ."

In Berlin too people were deeply moved. The SDS called for intensifying actions. Che had been Rudi Dutschke's inspiration. With Gaston Salvatore, a Chilean comrade and friend in the SDS, Dutschke had translated Che's last public statement, with its famous appeal for "two, three, many Vietnams," from Spanish into German. Like Che, Dutschke lived the conviction that there "is no life outside the revolution." He named his recently born son Hosea Che. Latin America would not let Dutschke go. In 1968 he wrote a foreword to *The Long March: The Course of the Revolution in Latin America*, a collection of articles by such figures as Régis Debray, Castro and K.S. Karol. Meschkat was surprised to see letters from Gisela, which she had sent him from Havana in the summer of 1967, printed in the book. As far as he had known, Dutschke had asked only for permission to read them.

Berlin 1968: with Rudi Dutschke

In the summer of 1967 Mandel and Dutschke grew closer. Dutschke noted in his diary: "Discussion with Gisela and Ernest, [Adorno's student Hans- Jürgen] Krahl, etc. about organizational questions and preliminary theoretical discussions for a conference in Berlin." Shortly before, Dutschke and Krahl had presented a so-called organization report to an SDS conference in the old refectory of the University of Frankfurt. Krahl was for Frankfurt what Dutschke was for Berlin — the undisputed chief ideologue. The SDS was growing dramatically, with 2,000 members and easily several times that many sympathizers, including not only university students but also high school students and young workers. They were for reform of the universities and against the Vietnam War, against the Greek dictatorship, against the emergency decrees and against the "emperor of torture," Shah Reza Pahlevi of Iran. Participating in their actions cost Benno Ohnesorg, a twenty-six-year-old student, his life. On 2 June 1967 he was shot dead by the police in Berlin, setting off a month-long rebellion.

Once the students' slogan had been "No theory without praxis." Suddenly that time seemed long past. Now the question was what strategy the SDS should choose and what type of organization was suited to it. Mandel discussed this in the summer of 1967 with Dutschke, Krahl, Meschkat, Altvater, Semler, Rabehl, and other student leaders. Their task was to "select the best comrades to create an organization within the SDS . . . to form a cadre . . . and to build a vanguard from inside the social-democratic union."

Dutschke held on to his position because of his flexibility. As Meschkat confided to Mandel, this "is surely a big danger for continuity but also an opportunity to reach agreement step-by-step after thorough discussion." Mandel set out to persuade Dutschke to transform the Marxist wing of the SDS into a revolutionary socialist youth organization, following the example of the French JCR. The JCR was a hybrid formation of Guevaraists and Trotskyists, anti-Stalinists with considerable influence among rebellious youth. The two or at most three hundred dissidents included Catherine Samary, Janette Habel, Henri Weber, Daniel Bensaïd, Pierre Rousset, and Alain Krivine. These were all spokespeople who felt the winds of change at their backs and who would make their mark on the world in May 1968. Mandel had been present at the foundation of the JCR, at a meeting high in the

Alps near Briançon in the winter of 1965. Among the last drivers to get police permission to cross the mountain pass was Krivine with his passenger, Ernest Mandel. Snow flurries and fog hindered visibility. In his suit and elegant shoes Mandel had to walk in front of the car for an hour through knee-high snow in order to show Krivine the way. They both arrived soaked through.

In December 1967 there was a meeting between Dutschke and Krivine, whom Mandel described as “one of the most intelligent and revolutionary of our young cadre.” A few days previously Dutschke had met, as Mandel expressed it, “some specialists . . . with interest in the specific matter about which we have confidentially spoken.” He meant the decision to sabotage the Vietnam War with blockades of weapon and troop transports and possibly by blowing up ships that were carrying military goods to Vietnam from German ports. The Milan publisher Giangiacomo Feltrinelli provided the explosives. The group involved had nothing at all in common with the Red Army Faction (Bader-Meinhof Gang), Dutschke declared ten years later. Their planned action was “violence against things, not against people,” and when they decided the risks were too great, they had the dynamite quietly dropped into the sea.

Mandel had the highest expectations of German events. In November he spoke on Cuba and Latin America to an audience of 1,500 students in Berlin. Two days later he spoke to 4,000, all of them waving red flags in honour of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution. The high point was the Vietnam congress held on 17 and 18 February 1968 in the central auditorium of the Technical University of Berlin, where Mandel was one of the most important speakers besides Dutschke. For those two days West Berlin was the centre of the international Left Opposition, drawing 5,000 participants from Germany and neighbouring countries.

Even earlier, in October 1966, opponents of the war had demonstrated in Liège, in a protest initiated officially by the Socialist Young Guard but in fact by the Fourth International. There too there were thousands of sympathizers from different countries demonstrating in the streets — Maoists, Trotskyists, young Communists and provos. Berlin 1967 was a follow-up to that, with the additional support of intellectual and cultural notables. [2] Over the auditorium hung a gigantic flag, the banner of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front, and beneath it Che’s summons: “The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution.” They made a fitting background for two days of impassioned speeches.

Tariq Ali, born in Lahore but living in Oxford since 1963, a student leader and Trotskyist, was one speaker. He was continually interrupted with applause and shouted slogans. On the platform he sat next to Mandel, who translated for him. In his own speech Mandel assured his listeners that the US could expect a defeat:

You all know Karl Marx’s clear vision that capital came into the world dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt . . . Today we are witnessing the fall of capitalism . . . dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt . . . Capital is sentenced to death. Our duty is not to look on passively . . . but actively to engage in the struggle.

His listeners knew he was supporting them when he condemned the violence of the authorities and the stream of slander from the Springer press. “A few technical points,” said Mandel, building up the suspense:

I don’t know if you know the photos of the Zengakuren students where you see them marching against the American aircraft carrier Enterprise, armed with helmets and clubs . . . I can only tell you that their example was followed last week by radical youth in Paris, and I suggest that the West Berlin students consider doing the same. [3]

Dutschke, sitting next to the chairman, and Mandel, at the far end of the table, had been making eye contact throughout; nods of approval showed their agreement.

The organizers had planned to follow the congress with a demonstration and march to the American military base in Berlin-Dahlem. The hall was buzzing with rumours about anticipated violence by the army and police. The audience alternated between taking part in the debates and carrying on heated conversations about how to cope with tear gas and how to pad clothing for protection against police clubs: "And don't forget your helmets!"

Alain Krivine, founder and leader of the JCR, stepped up to the microphone to describe the French student movement and the role of radical Paris youth. With his dreamy gaze, student's glasses and necktie — an object of anarchist mockery — Krivine seemed to have something of the romantic about him. In fact, he was a "hyperactive pragmatist" with a definite vocation for politics.

Krivine spent the nights of the congress at Dutschke's. They had held a discussion with the 300 or so French participants the evening before the congress began. There the French delegates got to know Dutschke, the Berlin "Terror of the Bourgeoisie," a short, athletic figure in a leather jacket, with lank hair falling into his eyes. He spoke so fast the translator had trouble keeping up. Dutschke drew the route of the demonstration on a blackboard, outlining danger zones, security measures and tactics. Because of their experience, the JCR's specialists were charged with providing security for the demonstrators.

On the afternoon of Sunday 18 February, around 15,000 mostly young protesters assembled for an exceptionally militant march through the city. Above a sea of red flags rose huge portraits of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh. From time to time a section would pause, then rush forward shouting slogans in cadence. Berlin had not witnessed a spectacle like this since the 1930s.

At 5:23 on the evening of 11 April 1968, the German Press Agency in Berlin distributed the following report: "On Thursday afternoon the SDS ideologue Rudi Dutschke was shot by an as yet unidentified perpetrator." Dutschke had received a potentially fatal wound in his face. The gunman, Josef Erwin Bachmann, was an unskilled house painter from Munich. He had waited for his victim some 50 metres outside SDS headquarters on the Kurfürstendamm. Pulling the trigger, he screamed in rage, "You dirty Communist pig!"

For some time right-wing circles had entertained violent fantasies. Encouraged by the Springer press, right-wing hostility had taken personal forms. The twenty-eight-year-old Dutschke had been labelled "Public Enemy Number 1." Short work had to be made of him: "Gas Dutschke!" "Away with this gang!" "Political enemy to the concentration camp!" Asked that very day if he ever feared an attack, Dutschke had responded: "Not fear. It could happen, but friends are on the lookout. Usually I don't travel alone. Of course some neurotic or lunatic can attack in a panic reaction." A few hours later the shots had rung out.

Dutschke lay on the operating table for seven hours. Students took to the streets to prevent the witch-hunting Springer papers from appearing. From Paris Mandel phoned Tariq Ali. The next day 2,000 people demonstrated in front of the German embassy in London and at the British Springer office. In Brussels young people shouted their solidarity with the slogan "Create two, three, many Berlins!" There was a similar scene in Paris, where three or four hundred JCR members lay siege to the German embassy. There was a clash with the police on the Boulevard St-Michel. By Easter Saturday Dutschke was out of danger, but the bullets in his head had left him with a severe speech impediment. His recovery was slow, and he had to learn to live with periodic epileptic seizures.

Dutschke's last diary entry before the attack was: "I'm very happy about . . . Paris. The comrades . . . have done it: getting the French left tendencies to one table. On 1 May I'll make a speech there . . ." May 1968 went down in history as the largest strike and protest ever in France, but the struggle began without Dutschke.

He wanted to get out of Germany and away from the scene of the disaster. First he stayed briefly in Switzerland, working on his recovery with the psychologist Thomas Ehleiter. Then he went on to Italy, to Marino, south of Rome, at the invitation of the composer Hans-Werner Henze. Politics came calling sooner than he wished. There were bad tidings from Berlin: "Christian [Semler] phoned, telling me the Russians' filthy tricks — Czechoslovakia is occupied. In Prague I'd have thought this impossible, but the students were much more realistic." "What dogs, what barbarians, what traitors."

Dutschke's stay at Henze's villa could not be concealed from the press — and once they knew, he had no more peace. In August his wife Gretchen flew to the United States to arrange a visa for him. Meanwhile Dutschke travelled unobserved to Brussels, where he stayed at the Mandels' home on Rue Josse Impens, a restful haven that he had to himself, since Gisela and Ernest were travelling in Canada and the US from September through November. Ernest was lecturing at something like twenty-five universities. Gisela was speaking about the European student protests at the SWP's invitation. Ernest heard from his mother that Dutschke was going through a crisis. Berlin friends had informed him that Canada had refused him a visa. Ignoring the possibility that the authorities might be eavesdropping, Dutschke had tried from the Rue Josse Impens house to contact Gretchen in the United States. The next day the police came to the door with a deportation order. In the stress of the moment Dutschke had suffered an epileptic seizure. Friends decided to send him to Berlin for tests. As Mandel heard from his mother, "He tried to convince me not to tell his wife that his friends had accompanied him to the doctor; instead to tell her that he had decided to drive himself there. Please keep to that story!!" To convey her concern to Ernest, Rosa continued,

I've done everything to make his being alone easier . . . Only I was a bit afraid that he'd get sick. It's obvious that friends have to help! Dear Ernest, from your earliest years at home, you've seen that we always helped friends!

In his posthumously published *Aufrecht Gehen: Eine fragmentarische Autobiographie* (Going Upright: A Fragmentary Autobiography), Dutschke noted that after staying two weeks at the Mandels' he had been declared *persona non grata* by the authorities.

Paris 1968: On the Barricades

In October 1967 *Les Temps Modernes* asked Mandel to write an article on "the nature and development of the socialist revolution in the developed countries of Europe and America." Mandel rather liked the idea. Questions about how the social, political, and psychological climate could be transformed lay close to his heart. He sought to discover how the workers could turn against the neo-capitalist regime that they had accepted in practice and move into a pre-revolutionary situation, continuing on to a revolutionary one. He wryly commented, "I suppose there's not much competition for this kind of subject." Mandel was not unrealistic.

No one would have dared claim that a revolution was on the agenda in Western Europe. Certainly not in France, where there was no chronic economic crisis, no involvement in a hopeless war, and no student movement comparable to that in West Germany or Japan. And yet in May 1968 a volcano erupted, giving the lie to all theories about the co-optation of the working class. There was still a note of disbelief in the commentary of *Les Temps Modernes* as late as June 1968 even as they

reported: "Now we know that a socialist revolution is not impossible in a Western European country, and perhaps in two or three."

Mandel never wrote his own article for the paper; there was simply no time amid the turmoil. Lenin's declaration, "It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of the revolution' than to write about it," certainly held true for Mandel. Nonetheless, he was not theoretically unequipped for the subject.

The Belgian general strike of 1960-61 had led Mandel to a new theory of Western European revolutions. He developed a revolutionary typology based not on the German revolution of 1918 or on the Yugoslav revolution of 1941-5 [4] but on "the French general strike of June 1936," when the arrival of the leftist Popular Front government was accompanied by a wave of factory occupations, "and to a lesser extent on the model of the Belgian general strike of 1960-1961." As he wrote in June 1965, workers in welfare states also radicalize in reaction to social, political, economic and military crises; and

once they are radicalised, they will launch more and more far-reaching campaigns during the course of which they will begin to link their immediate demands with a programme of anti-capitalist structural reforms, until eventually the struggle concludes with a general strike which either overthrows the regime or creates a duality of powers.

Mandel's theory was not completely developed in May 1968 but did provide sufficient material to comprehend what happened then. The particular moment was a surprise, but the event itself was not.

In this rebellion of youth and workers, Mandel served not only as a theoretician and political analyst but also as an agitator directly involved in the debates — as in Berlin — and a participant in combat during the Paris "night of the barricades." The rebellion's aims can be traced back in earlier form to the colonial war in Algeria and the workers' unrest of the mid-1960s. Its goals were simple and drastic: "Down with American imperialism, down with Gaullism!" On 3 May troops entered the Sorbonne and arrested students who were demonstrating against the closure of the University of Nanterre, a centre of protest against the Vietnam War and against undemocratic educational reforms. The University of Nanterre was also where the unity of students and workers had first been manifested. Sending troops into the Sorbonne led to weeks of confrontations in the Latin Quarter, which in turn led to strikes in almost every industry and every region of the country, with around 10 million workers involved.

On the evening of Thursday 9 May, the JCR organized a rally in the Mutualité, with, among others, Daniel Bensaïd, Henri Weber, and Ernest Mandel. Bensaïd and Daniel Cohn-Bendit had been the driving force behind the 22 March Movement, founded in Nanterre. Weber was a sociologist and at this time Alain Krivine's right-hand man. In the hall were delegations from Germany, Italy, and Belgium. Hundreds of students had been occupying the square in front of the Sorbonne all afternoon. This was the famous sit-in at which Cohn-Bendit called the onlooker Louis Aragon to account for the CP's *L'Humanité*, the "Stalinist piece of shit" that wouldn't stop smearing what it called ultra-leftists. On the spot, the JCR decided to make their rally into a broad show of unity. They removed their emblems and invited Cohn-Bendit to take a place on the stage under a banner reading, "Youth: from Revolt to Revolution." Inside and out, on the stairs and in the aisles, the place was packed.

Mandel took the floor. Now past forty-five, his wavy hair greying and his friendly eyes glancing from behind serious glasses, dressed in a suit and tie, he seemed to have wandered into the rebellion by mistake. Once behind the lectern the image changed instantly; he sparkled and shone with fervour

and excitement. Land occupations in Bolivia, factory occupations in Switzerland, demonstrations in Prague — he gave the French student protests their place in a whirlwind trip around the world. In closing he declared,

When this universal struggle succeeds in enlisting the adult workers, then we can remake today's vanguard into a powerful revolutionary party that can take its place at the forefront of the masses . . . Only together are we unconquerable. Only together will we be able to complete the great work that began fifty years ago with the October revolution, the victory of the socialist world revolution!

Enthusiastically Cohn-Bendit and Bensaïd called for unity, before giving the elated audience the orders to “gather tomorrow evening at the foot of the Belfort Lion,” the monument to French resistance in the Franco-Prussian War on Place Denfert-Rochereau.

In the afternoon of 10 May the procession of around 35,000 students, flanked by an army of police, started off from the Lion. It was quiet as they marched via Boulevard St-Michel past the closed-down Sorbonne and by the Luxembourg gardens. The bridges over the Seine were closed, and the Latin Quarter was surrounded by riot police. The crowd continuously chanted slogans like “*Nous irons jusqu'au bout!*” (We will go all the way!); no one thought of leaving. Suddenly there were muffled thuds, signalling that demonstrators had begun to break up the pavement. Shouts rang out: “The Quarter is ours!” From that moment the days of the Paris Commune were lived again. Behind the Panthéon, from Rue Gay Lussac to Rue d’Ulm, metres-high barricades arose, though it was not clear who was laying siege to whom. The more troops and police turned out, the higher the barricades grew. As night fell, the crowd’s spirits rose higher. Trees were cut down and cars overturned. As though in a competition, the cobblestone barricades were decorated with pots of blooming flowers, red and black flags, banners and sundry bric-a-brac. That night Ernest and Gisela helped build barricades on Rue Gay Lussac in the heart of the Latin Quarter. Doing the same work nearby were Alain Krivine, Pierre Rousset, Daniel Bensaïd, Henri Weber, and Janette Habel. At Janette’s side was Roberto Santucho, leader of the Argentinian Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), who was en route to Cuba via Paris with a group of Latin American guerrillas. By 11:00 p.m. the JCR had set up headquarters in the besieged neighbourhood. In Rue Gay Lussac, where a sympathizer ran a travel bureau, they gathered on the bureau’s ground floor behind lowered blinds, at least when they were not standing on the barricades. Messengers came and went. Loudspeakers on the shop front kept the barricade-builders informed about the negotiations with the university authorities. “It’s the night of the comrades.” Acquaintances and strangers embraced. “You’re here too?” “I couldn’t possibly miss this — it’s been so long!” Mandel and Nicos Poulantzas had last spoken to each other at the three-day Marx colloquium at Frankfurt’s Goethe University in September 1967. In debate they had not spared one another. It was different on the barricades. “After theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy and after controversy, united front. It’s nice, isn’t it?” Perry Anderson agreed absolutely.

In the small hours of the night a handful of comrades who had evaded the police ran into one another at the Ecole Normale Supérieure on Rue d’Ulm, red-eyed from the clouds of tear gas that had been unleashed. Among them were Bensaïd, Weber, Rousset, and Krivine. Ernest and Gisela had also escaped when the police opened their attack at 2:30 that morning. From one of the barricades Mandel had witnessed the play of fire and the destruction. A reporter from the *Observer* heard him shout, “Oh! How beautiful! It’s the revolution!” Gisela’s car had gone up in flames like a torch and they had continued on foot. Exhausted, they finally reached their apartment in Rue Vincennes, near the Bastille.

May ’68 had begun. Two days later, on 13 May, 10 million workers went on strike; factories were occupied; a million Parisians took to the streets. “Together we will be invincible.” Not only politically but also materially, the Fourth International was at full combat strength. Because of the strike, they were without fuel. Belgian and German comrades arrived every other day, their cars packed with

jerrycans of petrol. Those who had to flee France were welcomed hospitably in Brussels, Cologne, and Frankfurt.

Mandel's 9 May speech had attracted attention from other quarters besides the Latin. Returning from a trip to Spain in early July, Ernest and Gisela were hauled from their hotel beds in Narbonne at an early hour. Mandel had been forbidden to enter France by an order dated 10 June, without his ever being informed. Gisela got permission to continue the trip, but Ernest was held for more than twelve hours at the police station. He was given a pickled pig's foot to eat, with only a spoon — a knife and fork would have made him too dangerous. Accompanied by two officers from the security service, he was taken across the border into Belgium by train — first class. His status as *persona non grata* in France was only lifted in 1981.

Paris had not become St Petersburg, nor had May '68 become October '17; the revolt did not become a revolution. Nonetheless the European left was suddenly seeing what revolution looked with its own eyes after so many years of reports from abroad. The struggle in Vietnam, Cuba, and Algeria was still "our struggle," but this was no longer only symbolic but actual, with direct influence back and forth recognized and acknowledged. [5]

Where had this transformation in the political culture come from? Why the change from resignation to rebellion, from obedience to mutiny? And, once more, what prevented a definitive breakthrough? Why had the revolt remained incomplete? Just back from Spain, Mandel posed these questions in "The Lessons of May 1968," an article published in *Les Temps Modernes* and *New Left Review*. He said that May '68 had been a consequence of the contradictions of neo-capitalism. The standard of living had risen, but demands had risen even more, particularly for democracy and an end to alienation. Though the West had experienced no catastrophe like that of 1929, it was hardly free from recessions. The crisis in university education that led to the explosion of May '68 was heightened by a system that, absorbed by the interests of planning long-term labour costs, left no room for normal trade union action. That made resistance explosive and violent. In his analysis of the objective socioeconomic factors, Mandel was elaborating on earlier work. What was new was his thinking on the model of revolution that became visible in May '68. The revolt showed resemblances to the general strikes in France in 1936 and Belgium in 1960-61. May '68 helped Mandel refine his model in four aspects.

First, he noted the explosive character of the actions, a combination of strikes, sit-ins, factory occupations, demonstrations, and confrontations with the repressive forces. He considered all of these to be forms of resistance that arose spontaneously. They had nothing to do with the middle-class origins of students, with political immaturity or with provocateurs, contrary to the claims of their opponents and the Communists of the CP and the CGT. Second, he noted that once active, the proletariat spontaneously became aware of its power. It came to realize that the existing order was bourgeois, and every assault against it was in vain as long as the opponents' rules of play were respected. Third, he observed that the younger workers in particular defended radical forms of action. This was confirmed by every revolution: experiments are first made by minorities. [6] Finally, Mandel said that May '68 showed that the idea of a gradual, institutionalized establishment of workers' control or other anti-capitalist structural change was an illusion.

Despite the massiveness of the May explosion, the Gaullist system had consolidated its power. The vanguard, the most conscious and active group, had not bonded sufficiently with the broader movement. Nonetheless, the workers had been concerned with more than direct economic demands. For example, in Paris print shops the workers demanded correction of inaccurate headlines in *Le Figaro* and refused to print articles in *La Nation* that harmed the strike. Still, Mandel emphasized to Perry Anderson, there had been limits:

They rejected instinctively “pure” trade-union goals, but generally didn’t know by what to complement them. Propaganda and education (incl. agitation and action) for transitional demands (anti-capitalist structural reforms) prior to the crisis would have been necessary in order to assure that “conscious leap” from wage demand to workers control or workers power.

Faithful to Leninist orthodoxy, Mandel pointed to the absence of a vanguard with influence in key factories comparable to its influence in the universities. Even had there been such, he added, he did not think that France would have been a mere twenty-four hours away from socialism, nor that a French “October” would have been just around the corner. But he did think there might have been a French “February,” a breakthrough to a situation of dual power. Had this taken place, Mandel considered that a decisive page in French and European history would have been turned.

Jan Willem Stutje

P.S.

* Verso, 18 May 2018:

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3825-just-short-of-the-conscious-leap-ernest-mandel-in-1968>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.versobooks.com/books/371-ernest-mandel>

[2] There were eleven participating organizations, including the JCR (France); the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) and the Trotskyists around the paper Falce Martello, or Hammer and Sickle (Italy), the SJW (Belgium), the Dutch student organization Politeia, and the youth organization of Britain’s Labour Party. Support came from Jean-Paul Sartre, Bertrand Russell, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Luchino Visconti, Eric Hobsbawm, Luigi Nono, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Peter Weiss, and Alberto Moravia. T. Fichter and S. LoÈnnendonker, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Studenten*, p. 170.

[3] The Zengakuren, or All-Japanese Federation of Students’ Self-Governing Associations, was a movement of over 300,000 students with a strong left- Communist and Trotskyist wing. It played a leading role in the anti-imperialist mobilizations of the mid 1960s.

[4] For moderate critics, the absence of a military or economic catastrophe proved that any resolution other than a reformist one was utopian. For critics from the left, a revolution remained bound to the outbreak of a crisis like those of 1914-7 or 1929.

[5] In *Antisystemic Movements*, Giovanni Arrighi, T. Hopkins, and I. Wallerstein called 1968 — the May revolt, the Prague Spring, the Tet offensive in Vietnam — the second world revolution after 1848. The revolution failed but changed the world radically.

[6] Mandel said that the vanguard, a group of between 15,000 and 20,000 young people, students and young workers, was big enough to launch effective actions.