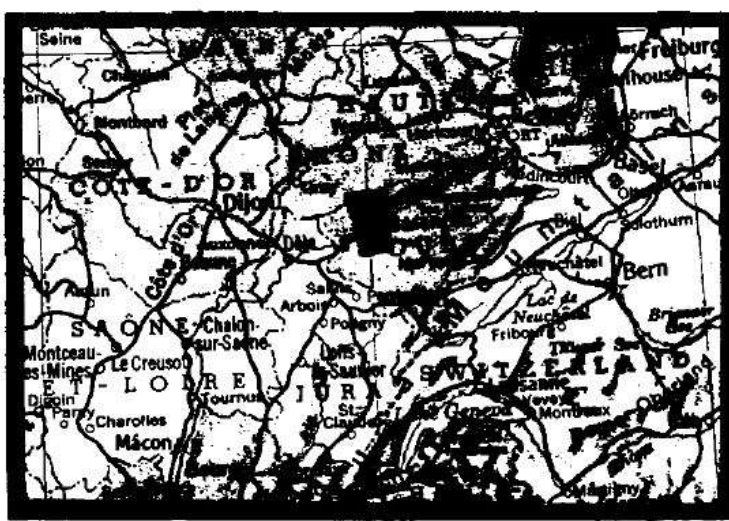


TIME RECAPTURED



**SELF-MANAGEMENT AND
THE LIP OCCUPATION**



“This is the time not for ideas but for action, for deeds. Above all, now is the time for the organization of the forces of the proletariat. But this organization must be the task of the proletariat itself.”

Bakunin. *Letter to the Comrades
of the Jura Federation.* 1873



Since the middle of June, the 1300 workers of the Lip watch concern in Besançon, France, have been in occupation of their factory, where they have continued production on their own. Already, this *active* occupation constitutes a moment of historical activity that no one can ignore. The strength of the Lip movement has been such that even its enemies have been obliged to feign support for it merely in order to retain their prestige. In taking their collective fate into their own hands, the men and women of Lip have begun a *critique-in-acts* of present social conditions. By seizing a factory, and thereby placing the immediate means of production and distribution at the service of their project, they have reversed the current state of social affairs and *they know it*. In organizing their activity *by themselves*, the Lip workers have affirmed their autonomy against the combined machinery of capitalism, the French Left, and the national trade unions. And in directly confronting the most oppressive reality of their lives—work—they have called the whole of capitalist society into question.

The implications of this movement are numerous—so numerous, in fact, that many of them have not been recognized by the participants on either side of the Lip controversy. It is these hidden tendencies which must be exposed to the critical light of day. In order for the movement to advance, both at Lip and elsewhere, a consciousness is required of *what has already been accomplished* and what this means for the *future*. Everyone is quite aware that the present situation at Lip is provisional. Either the occupation will be extended with the revolutionary participation of others, or it will be defeated in isolation in one way or another.

Through appropriating the product of their labor—the watches which they make—the workers of Lip have appropriated time *for themselves*. In precisely the sense intended by Marx, they have “expropriated the expropriators.” They have taken an economic sector away from those who appropriate the work and the time—in fact, the life itself—of the proletariat. As such, the Lip workers have given a new meaning to their lives, both in quantity and quality.

By reducing the price of Lip watches by 40 percent and initiating a wild-cat form of distribution, the occupiers have already made a practical critique of political economy: they have adjusted the value of the objects they make in order to conform with their immediate needs. In doing so, they have revealed the truth of bourgeois value—their action exposes the exchange and surplus values inherent in commodity production as *superfluities*. The devaluation is simultaneously a devaluation of capitalist power. On a local but no less important level, the workers of Lip have reduced economic processes to “a simple administration of things.”

In their own actions, in the free association of individuals in a common project, the Lip workers have discovered both the theory and the practice of their occupation. They have given the world a lesson in the power of radical spontaneity. They have had no need either of a party or of any other so-called “vanguard.” Through their self-organization, they have begun to undermine the social organization of the old world. Their power contains within it the negation of bourgeois society, of hierarchy, and of exploitation. Even the Stalinist pimp, Georges Séguy (head of the CGT), recognizes this; he recently declared emphatically that he “would not buy Lip watches.”

The movement at Lip began as a response to the threat of a general lay-off; in the by-now familiar words of British capitalism, the Lip workers had become “redundant.” But the workers’ organization of production at Lip has implicitly superseded the immediate question of economic survival. The Lip occupation has concretely posed the larger question of *social power*. In asking this question in a *practical* manner, the workers of Lip have already begun to answer it. They have transformed part of the terrain of capitalism into the terrain of the proletariat. *L’Express* reported that “work has taken on the air of a festival” at Lip.

The widespread enthusiasm generated by the events at Besançon in France, Europe, and the entire world, is itself an indication of the essential radical nature of the occupation. Everywhere, the proletariat recognizes itself in this exemplary action. Everywhere, those without power see in Lip the beginnings of real change—the new power of Lip is *their* power as well. But this recognition is not enough in itself; the power of the Lip workers can only be confirmed through the creation of similar such powers. The only real support that can be given this movement is its *extension* to all sectors of society. The spontaneous generation of occupations in May ’68 has shown how rapidly such actions can occur and how quickly they can place capitalism in serious danger of a fatal collapse.

At the same time, May ’68 demonstrated capitalism’s ability to defuse and recuperate even the most radical social crisis. Today, these same forces of recuperation threaten the Lip occupation. Already, a united front of the old world is preparing Lip’s defeat. Using time-honored methods of social counter-insurgency, Capital is trying to buy off the movement and is doing so with the less-than-clandestine intervention of the trade unions and the parties of the “Left.” To understand how such apparent enemies can come to a gentleman’s agreement, one need only remember the Grenelle accords (concluded between the Stalinists and De Gaulle) after May ’68 and the subsequent “victorious return to work,” as the French CP rather candidly described *its* victory over the revolutionary movement.



**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LIP WORKERS, JUNE 10 1973:
A UNANIMOUS VOTE TO BEGIN PRODUCTION ON THEIR OWN**

“As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own needs drive it on. It makes a practical assessment of its own task. The French proletariat (like the proletariat in all countries) is capable of accomplishing its own revolution.”

Karl Marx. The Class-Struggles in France: 1973

Capital will certainly attempt to recapture the Lip factory either by force or by deception. The French government may decide to return Lip to its previous owners or it may devise an acceptable form of “workers’ control” in which the workers would be compelled to “choose” their own boss with the added consent of the unions. Capitalism would thereby “legitimize” a deformed “occupation,” and Lip could then be easily reintegrated into its system. Or even further, it may try to close the factory and lay-off a number of the employees. Whatever “solution” is proposed by capitalism, the end result would be the same: the perpetuation of class-society.

Capitalism and its partners, the unions, always attempt to rearrange the particular details of alienation. But at Lip it is the *abolition* of alienation which is now on the agenda. The Lip workers have succeeded in thwarting the bosses’ power for the moment and, as a consequence, hierarchy must assume a different guise and use other means to reinstate itself. These various forms of subterfuge must be guarded against; having kicked their bosses out the front door, the workers of Lip cannot let them slip back through the window in the bureaucratic form of the unions. All leaders are cops. Having lived without their former employers, the Lip workers know

perfectly well how to live without *all* bosses. The occupiers of Lip have shown (and they always knew it!) that they are capable of organizing their lives themselves. The sign placed over the factory entrance says it all: "It's possible: we produce and we distribute."

The workers of Lip have so far displayed a radical sense of tactics and strategy in their struggle against their ex-bosses and the local and national authorities. When they occupied their factory on June 10 they took management officials as hostages; these were only released after 200 police stormed the plant. Nevertheless, the Lip workers maintained their occupation and took new hostages in the form of 65,000 watches (worth \$2.5 million) which were in the company's existing stockpile of finished products. These watches were then hidden within Besançon as a guarantee against future repression. Not surprisingly, the French association of manufacturers (CNPF) has expressed its alarm over these actions. In decrying the "theft" of Lip watches (to say nothing of the Lip factory), the bosses have unwittingly revealed the *social* theft which is the basis of all property. The Lip workers have only recovered what had been stolen from them every day through the very dynamics of capitalist production.



CURRENCY ISSUED BY THE PARIS COMMUNE, 1871

"The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs . . . they have understood that it is their imperious duty and their absolute right to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power."

— Manifesto of the Central Committee of the National Guard (Paris).
March 18, 1871.

The general assembly of the Lip workers already forms a potential basis for the establishment of a councilist power—it is a functioning example of direct democracy. But this radical power must recognize itself as such. The success of the occupation is by no means assured. To the extent that the Lip workers allow themselves to be represented-by the CFDT, for example—they have opened the door to the destruction of their autonomy. The unions already have reasserted their power in the committees (production, distribution, support) created by the occupation. The French press now speaks approvingly of a “ménage à trois”—CGT, CFDT, and the Lip Action Committee—at Besançon. This living arrangement is quite acceptable to capitalism and as long as it continues it is a sign, not of “workers’ unity,” but of the power of bureaucratic tendencies over the occupation movement.

The influence of the local trade unions is the most serious obstacle to any consciously radical movement at Lip. Throughout the occupation, the unions have been caught up in the flow of events. They have participated only to the extent that they have gone beyond the traditional role of trade unionism; as a result, they have been abandoned by the national trade union leadership. The mini-bureaucrats thus realize that their position is tenuous; if the occupation movement continues, they will be deprived of their role as *mediators*. Already, the resumption of production at Lip lies outside the province of *syndicalisme*. The Lip workers are not on strike, they are managing the means of production *for themselves*. But they must also take control of the occupation movement *for themselves*. The achievements of the Lip occupation can be reversed in a day unless the local union leadership is seen as its *enemy*.

If the incipient bureaucracy at Lip remains unchallenged, the results will be predictable. Each time that the French proletariat has attempted to establish its own authority—1936, 1945, 1968—the unions and parties have intervened, always to the profit of hierarchical social organization. However “democratic” and in favor of “self-management” they pretend to be, the unions are the necessary accomplices of capitalism. For the CFDT to speak of “self-management” is as ironical as when the Stalinists speak of “socialism.” Quite naturally, the unions seek an “immediate solution” to the Lip situation; they fear the spread of the occupation movement.

All parties, whether in power or not, exhibit the same features. Their methods and their goals are similar—to gain power “on behalf” of someone else. The political charade found its most recent expression in the boisterous clamor made by the press, the Left parties, and militant sects, following the suppression of the Ligue Communiste. The actions of the trotskyists and the French government’s response were both uniquely *spectacular*. In the era of international detente, the impotent nationalist ravings of the fascists have no more importance in relation to contemporary social struggles than the counter-histrionics of the ridiculous militant sects. While the racist assholes of the Ordre Nouveau rant about “immigrant” workers, the little militants of the Left reveal their own impotence: they can find no enemy other than the big bad fascist wolf. In suppressing the Ligue Communiste and the Ordre Nouveau, Power gives these non-entities an exaggerated importance—an importance which serves to conceal the real movement of opposition to spectacular society. The French Minister of the



THE EX-BOSSES OF LIP

Interior, Marcellin, can free the little bolshevik bosses immediately — Krivine and Rousset are of no danger to *him*. The trotskyists are no more revolutionary than those who support them today; their friend Mitterand and the French CP head up the list of their current "comrades."

The circus surrounding the suppression of the Ligue Communiste has nothing to do with the revolutionary movement. What is presently unfolding at Lip goes far beyond such political spectacles. In their practice, the workers of Lip have openly announced the existence of the subversive forces at work in present society, forces which at the same time will build a different society. This movement, already present at Lip, must become fully conscious of itself and its tasks in order to communicate its actions and ideas to the world.

At present, a stalemate exists at Lip. On July 13th, a French judicial tribunal declared the formal "liquidation" of the Lip establishment, but this action has no significance even in terms of bourgeois jurisprudence. In any case, the workers of Besançon have already liquidated Lip as a capitalist institution and in the last analysis it is they who will make the final decision about their factory. They have shown their determination to continue the struggle; on July 14th (Bastille Day, appropriately), they physically prevented the entry of a management representative at the facility.

The Lip workers have discovered their own radicalism by taking the initiative; their active occupation raises the issue of generalized self-management as a practical and immediate possibility. But this is not enough; the possible must become real. The questions raised by Lip must find their definitive solution in the practice of all those who want to change the world. The Lip workers will have lost this battle as soon as they surrender the initiative to capitalism or its unions. Many have become demoralized as a result of the existing impasse. It is clear that a return to the situation prior to the occupation would be a defeat. Victory lies only in the abolition of wage-labor and its bosses, in all society as at Lip. There is no possible basis of agreement between Power and those whom Power abuses.

In establishing a base for revolutionary action, the proletarians of Lip, of France, of the world, face the problems confronted by all the authentic revolutions of this century, namely the establishment and defense of a power without mediators. History offers many examples (suppressed by bourgeois analysts, Leninists, and ideologues of all kinds): Kronstadt, Ukraine, the Red Army of the Ruhr, the Spanish and Hungarian Revo-



KRONSTADT, 1921

meanwhile...



Isaac Shorter and Larry Carter (top) kept plant shut for 13 hours

Detroit

Two disgruntled workers, armed with heavy tools and shielded by sympathizers, barricaded themselves in a power control cage yesterday and shut down a Chrysler assembly line for two shifts.

More than 4500 workers were idled and the Jefferson assembly line, which produces about 60 Chryslers and Imperials an hour, could not move.

A Chrysler spokesman said Isaac Shorter, 26, and Larry Carter, 23, entered the cage on the plant's first floor about 6 a.m.

They locked themselves in the heavy wire-mesh cage and turned off the power that runs the body shop conveyor, the critical first part of assembly line operations. This cut off the supply of parts farther down the line.

After 11 hours of negotiations, Chrysler bowed to demands of Shorter and Carter and fired a superintendent. It also agreed not to take disciplinary action against the two.

Shorter and Carter gave up their occupation about 7:30 p.m., 13 hours after it began, and left the plant peacefully.

Protected by sympathizers who surrounded the cage to prevent plant security guards from physically removing them, Shorter and Carter demanded that the superintendent, Thomas Woolsey, 32, a six-year Chrysler veteran, be fired for being abusive and abrasive.

Chrysler said Woolsey was discharged after the charges had been "investigated thoroughly."

United Press

Wed., July 25, 1973

lutions. All these radical moments witnessed the appearance of workers' councils, democratic organs of self-management which organized the revolutionary transformation of existing social relations.

Despite their inadequacies, the proletarian revolutions of the past form a point of departure for the new revolutionary movement. In each instance, the revolutionary power established was not the dictatorship of a party *over* the proletariat but was a direct organizational expression of the workers themselves—the co-ordination of various tasks was accomplished through the election of revocable delegates answerable to a general assembly. Where such a direct democracy was able to develop, as in Spain-1936 where councils organized production, distribution, and defense over a large area, it proved to be the clearest example of what the revolutionary “organization of the forces of the proletariat” means.

Spain and other radical explosions indicated only the *beginnings* of a councilist power, however. The achievements of the past are today only an absolute *minimum* for any revolutionary movement. The technical resources of contemporary society will enable the modern proletariat to accomplish in a few days what the Spanish revolutionaries were never able to complete—the total self-management of the means of production. Beyond such a task lies an immense game with space, time, and people: the complete reconstruction of the world according to human *desires*.

In spite of the radical accomplishments of the Lip occupation, one important step remains to be taken before the situation at Besançon becomes openly revolutionary. The self-defense realized by the Lip workers is a necessary precondition, but is itself not sufficient to establish real self-management. The workers of Lip cannot simply lay hold of the existing social machinery, and wield it for their own purposes. They must create new forms of social organization. At this time, the movement can only go forwards or recede. The actions of Lip must be echoed in other sectors of society. The movement that began at Besançon will succeed only through the creation of a widespread revolutionary situation—a social movement of which May '68 and the “Hot Autumn” in Italy in 1969 were only a taste.

Lip cannot be a tourist attraction for passive spectators. The open invitation made by the occupiers to other workers to come and see what is taking place at Besançon is certainly one of the most radical gestures of their movement—the Lip workers have sought to make their struggle known to everyone. But the example of Lip must be extended and improved. It is only a beginning.

The present occupation gives a new and subversive content to the French advertising slogan: “Lip gives the exact time.” Now, it is the workers who give the true time, the hour when everything is possible, including social revolution. Already, the clothing workers of the Robin factory in Brittany have initiated a similar active occupation.

The kind of occupation taking place at Lip is precisely what was lacking in May '68. At that time, if one occupied factory had resumed production on a radical basis, the effect would have been that of a social detonator. By the same token, however, the occupiers of Lip require a large scale movement like that of May '68 in order to extend what they have begun. Today, the first signs of a general revolt are visible everywhere in France, in the high

schools and in the many strikes like that of the Renault workers. Lip is not alone. Social conditions are the same everywhere and capitalism everywhere engenders the forces which will one day destroy it.

In attempting to show the implications of the Lip strike, we have only shown what was *already there*. The construction of the future awaits all those who wish to pursue their dissatisfaction with present society to its logical conclusion—a revolution of everyday life. In this text, we have not spoken *for* anyone except ourselves and others must now do the same for themselves. This text can in no way take the place of radical activity and it has not been written in order to be passively consumed—it must be submitted to practical and theoretical criticism. We have recognized our own desires in the actions of Lip; what others see in us will form the basis of a common project.

We carry a new world in our hearts, a world which is growing at this very moment.

The Friends of the Jura Federation.
August , 1973.

(A French version of this text was distributed recently at Besançon and throughout France.)



This text itself marks the extension of an international revolutionary project. Not only is it a collaboration undertaken by revolutionaries of different countries, it represents an effort to intervene directly in a present struggle on an international level. Since the implications of the Lip occupation concern everyone, we will distribute this text as widely as possible, in order to contribute to further world-wide agitation and to the development of a situationist revolution.

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