1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

"Our students are extremely nice - if they weren't, they'd never put up with such appalling conditions.", wrote a French professor in 1965. This remark was symptomatic of the fear of those involved in Higher Education that sometime, the vastly overcrowded universities would 'explode' : but, like in so many other things, the French authorities were content to let things get worse until something happened. Even in the 1940's, it was impossible for students at the Sorbonne to get seats at the most popular lectures without sitting through the previous hour, and duplicated copies of lectures were sold freely - even until recently, it was possible to get lectures first delivered 20 years ago. Not until the 1960's was any real attempt made to consider the problem; but by then it was, so to speak, too late, and the desperate programme of university building in the Paris area only exacerbated the problem. However, to see in perspective the recent developments in French university education, through May '68 to the construction of Vincennes, one must first look in some detail at the history of French education, especially at a university level. The peculiarities of the French system, which led to student unrest being at its height in France, at a time when the rest of the world experienced it to a lesser or less effective extent can not usefully be studied in historical abstraction or isolation; nor can the developments in French education since then, on which the majority of this study will be based be examined aside from French society in general.

I propose to divide the study into 5 main sections :-

1/ Introduction - French University education up to 1968

2/ May '68 - causes, course, and results - Faure & Vincennes

3/ Government, organisation and social structure of the University

participation and conflict - staff/student/worker relationships

4/ The curriculum - teaching methods, course content etc. Politics and the curriculum.

5/ Evaluation and conclusions - the future of Vincennes ?

Although only one section is related to the content of the curriculum as such, a sociological study of an educational institution should be more than merely a static analysis of the study programme in isolation. A curriculum is far more important with regard to its purpose, and its general underlying motivation, than its actual content with regard to specific subjects. That is to say, the curriculum of an English university, regardless of whether it is styled 'traditional' or 'modern' will be directed to serve the needs of the English social system, which is in the last analysis, the needs of the ruling class - and these needs change as the forces and modes of production change. As Ernest Mandel says[1] 'In the context of neo-capitalism, technocratic reform of the university - transformation from the classical to the technocratic university - is inevitable.' Thus the sociology of the curriculum in an advanced capitalist society must begin with the premise that the curriculum has been designed to meet the needs of capitalism, neo or otherwise, and from there proceed to see how it does so. For, as universities contain those who have been chosen as the 'most intelligent' 5% of the population, some of whom look beyond the existing order of things, it would be reasonable to assume that in the context of the late 60's, under pressure from a large and radical student movement, the curriculum would be diverted into more critical, even revolutionary channels - and as such, would serve the needs of the government just as efficiently by means of what Marcuse has called 'repressive tolerance'. However, if one is examining the curriculum as a whole, nd not just its material representation in a list of classes, lecture topics etc., one can see how such things as timetable routings, examinations, continuous assessment and all manner

rigid rules with regard to work requirements, and in the majority of subjects, the emphasis given in lectures and seminars, serve to condition the student to accept the status quo. This is either, in scientific subjects, by ignoring social, political and other 'ideological' implications of the subject - or, more subtley, as in the social sciences, by presenting a form of 'ideological supermarket', from which the student can take his choice. The curriculum of the modern bourgeois university is designed to mould the ruling elite, both material and intellectual of the next generation in the way the present generation would wish it to go. Progress of a sort is inevitable and welcomed - but it is limited progress authorised from above, not that demanded from below.

The case of Vincennes is, following this analysis worthy of study in that it marked at its inception a radical break from the type of university described above; in the curriculum, organisation and whole social structure of the university. Vincennes was intended by the French Ministry of Education to be 'educationally' revolutionary, for what reasons we will see later - this involved giving students a more active part in the running and functioning of courses and the university as a whole. However, this inevitably led to attempts to make it politically revolutionary in a practical as well as a theoretical sense, a development which the government was not prepared to accept. To analyse whether either experiment was 'sucessful' is not the prime task of this study, for such a judgement would be at best totally subjective, and its worst, devoid of any kind of base on which it could usefully be made. Rather, it is to analyse i) how far, if at all the ideas behind Vincennes could have succeeded in their social context, and ii) the progress and development of those ideas to date. Vincennes was intended to be, by many of the students a university to serve the working class, both directly (by allowing them admission without the

to serve the needs of the working class as a whole). The whole structure of the place should therefore be radically different from that of an ordinary u iversity, and in will be the purpose of this study to, among other things, locate the differences.

Methods of Fieldwork

In all, I spent nearly 5 weeks in Paris for the purposes of this project, visiting Vincennes most days. The research method could best be des ribed as 'participant observation' - both by attending classes, mainly in the Cinema and Anglo-American departments, but equally important by political meetings, and spending time in the coffee bars and communal areas, where most students are to be found, and gaining something of the atmosphere of the place. In Vincennes, perhaps more than anywhere else, the social, political and intellectual life of a university are totally interdependent and directly related to each other. To examine the social structure of the place with the usual tools of sociological research - questionaires, interviews and the like would, I think give a false, of at best a very narrow angle onto the work of the university, and, more importantly, would convey little of its originality. Also, the atmosphere of Vinvennes is far from conducive to ordered, methodological investigation; in fact, I am sure that no such survey would been possible with the limited time and resources at my disposal.

However, this is not to say that what follows will merely be an eye-witness account. I spoke to many people, students, teachers and administrators involved with Vincennes in France and in England - particularly people who had been involved with it since its inception, and who had written about it.

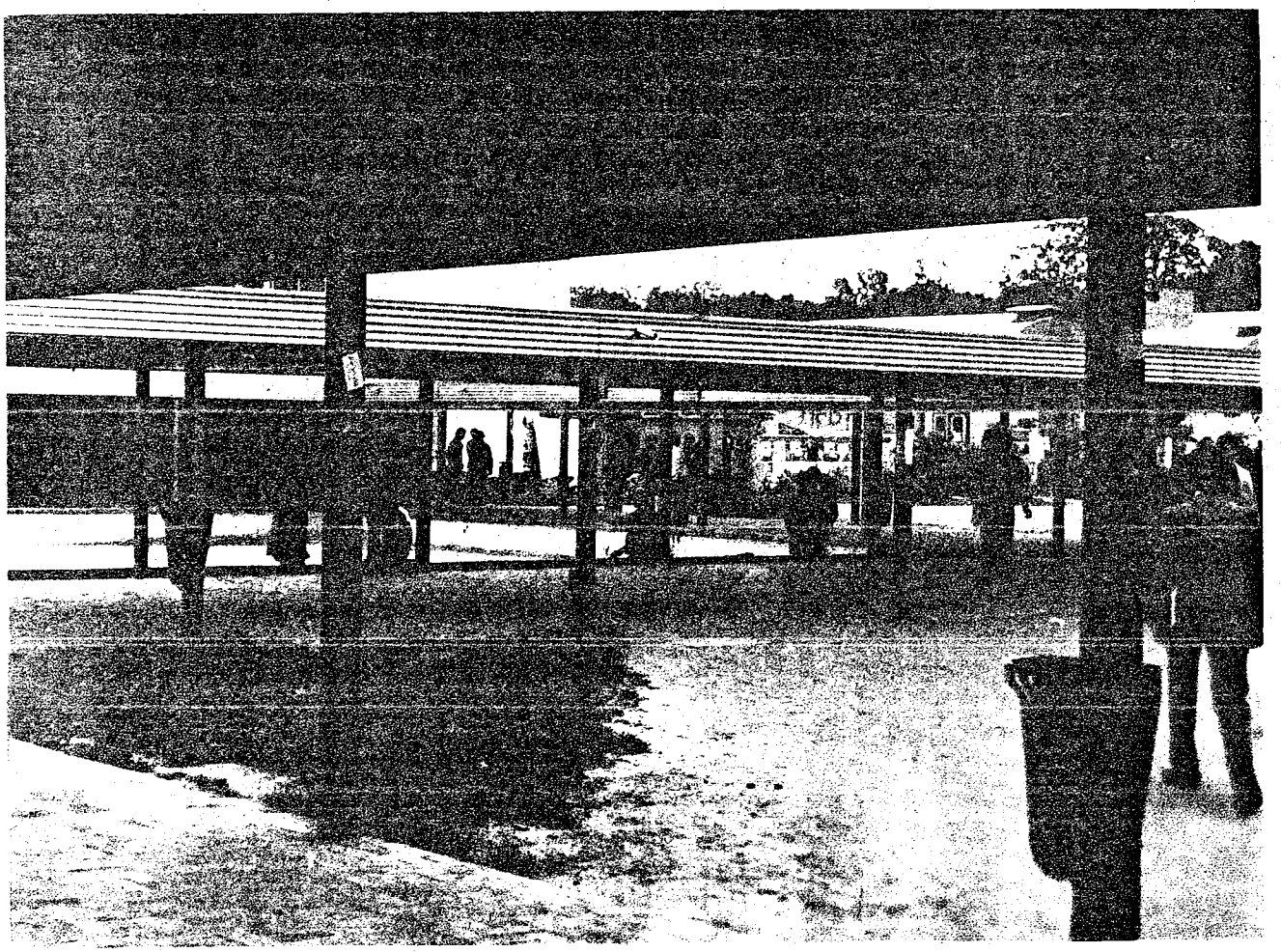
My main visit in April of this year was complicated by the fact that for almost the whole time I was there, the university was on strike. This meant of course that I was unable to attend classes in other

departments, which I had intended to do, but in many ways it contributed to a better understanding of the whole nature and working of the university. What was intended by both the initiators and participants to be a revolutionary university was in a state of 'revolution', and the state of revolution appeared to be no different from the normal state. However the differences that were apparent were of great value in assessing the relationship between revolutionary politics and the curriculum, theory and practice. I will deal with this later in the project.

What then is the problem which this study is intended to solve, or at least throw light on. It is not to decide whether the experiment has been a success - for even to assume that Vincennes was really intended as an experiment is doubtful. Whether of not, according to the success of Vincennes, other such centres were envisaged is an interesting question but it now seems clear that whatever the Ministry of Education may have said, and however much may have been made of Faure's dream of a 'radical university of the future', Vincennes was not a model for future French universities. If it was experimental at all, the experiment was in politics rather than purely educational - an attempt to solve the problem of student unrest by giving them a playground well out of the way to do what they liked with. Among the titles of my project suggested by French students were 'Vincennes as a symptom of the advancing disintegration of bourgeois university' or 'Vincennes as a denial of liberal theories of education'. Basing my work to some extent on these premises, the problem which I tentatively hope to be ablt to throw some light on is the relation between the changeing of traditional educational and cultural values in the Vincennes curriculum, and the changing of the reality of French society in the wake of May '68. For it is the effect of ideas, rather than ideas in themselves which are their real significance; so it is the effect Vincennes and its students have had on French society

which is its real importance, rather than the intentions of its founders. For that reason, I have not concentrated on any particular aspect of the university for special examination, but from an analysis of various facets of its activity, I hope to be able to contribute something towards an understanding of its relative successes and failures for all concerned.

1 'The changing role of the bourgeois university' Ernest Mandel - Spartacus League, 1970. Reprinted in Countercourse (Ed. Pateman) 1972



2 MAY 1968 - CAUSES, COURSE AND RESULTS

The 'evennements' of May 1968 in France (the most popular phrase to describe what happened, as it is devoid of political context) have been interpretted in more than a few ways since they occured. Some have seen them as spontaneous and of little importance; others have compared them with Leningrad 1917 or Barcelona 1936 as revolutionary situations of the first order. In between the two extremes, some sociologically and politically sound commentaries and analyses have been produced, giving the events a clear historical perspective, examining them in their totality (the general strike being of far more importance, economically and politically than the student barricades), and suggesting reasons for their abrupt extinction, leading to the Gaullist landslide victory in the June election. For the purposes of this project, it will not be necessary to go into intricate detail on the course of the events, and Vincennes itself will be treated as the prime result educationally; but the causes must be presented fully, that is, the reasons why the French educational system could not at that particular time take any more. If I deal with the events mainly in terms of the student uprisings, this is only because for the purposes of this project they are important, and should not be taken as implying that they were the only significant historical features of May.

The French education system after the Second World War was in a state of shronic overcrowding, and the structures, both with regard to the curricula and the school and university buildings themselves were for the most part old and ill-equipped. This was to a certain extent the case all over Europe, but it was at its worst in France. As Georges Pompidou, then Prime Minister told the National Assembly as late as 1965,

"In reality, our education, and particularly our system of secondary education has not been able to develop. It still lives for the most part on postulates bequeathed to it by the Jesuits of the seventeenth century, and which were only slightly modified at the end of the last century'.

In the university sector, the chronic backwardness was epitomised by the survival of the Napoleonic model: one university for the whole of France. Although there were in fact nominally autonomous universities in many major towns, they were subservient to the Min. Ed. in a way English universities have never been. Timetabling, staff appointments and the most insignificant bye-laws had to be referred to the ministry for approval and even today this has changed only very little.

Prior to the French Revolution, 4 faculties existed - theology, law medicine and the arts, a combination largely unchanged since Roman times. These were the 4'managerial' groups of Ancient society. Following the revolution, they were done away with, only to be reintroduced by Napoleon who, opposed to the idea of universities brought about the rebirth of faculties, with the di ference that they took the form of independent institutions. However, the traditional activities and disciplines alone remained - new types of training, in the sciences, especially engineering was left to special schools, such as 'les écoles centrales'. Only later in the nineteenth century did the term 'university' meaning a seperate institution come into use again, but it was still imprecisely defined, a loose collection of faculties. Although today most subjects can be studied at university, the range is not yet as good as even in Britain and certainly far behind the USA, although in certain fields, such as cinema, France has several university faculties whereas Britain has none.

The democracy in a department or faculty of the average French university was, and still is to a large extent very limited. As Jean Capelle says, 'The basic unit of the faculty is always the professional chair, denoting a domain of knowledge belonging literally to one man who reigns over it as an absolute monarch until he has reached retiring age.'[1] This has led in many instances to science and letter faculties becoming confined to the constricting activity of replenishing the teaching profession; but recently, more holders of first degrees have been breaking out of the academic circle and into other sectors of the economy.

During the middle 60's, several universities did make efforts to break from the constrictions of the Napoleonic model, and the whole purpose of universities and university education was rethought. Jean Capelle writing in 1966[2] listed 4 prerequisites for a modern university, in order that it be more than just a teaching factory :-

a. a size that does not rule out the possibility of personal contact
b. while the range of disciplines may be wide, the field of activity of the whole should be centred on a common objective, so as to enable co-operation between disciplines
c. the government of the various departments should be such that it was not vested in one man, the professor, and isolated from the influence of other disciplines.
d. that it should be able to adapt itself to fluctuations in employment oppurtunities in the higher grades, and generally to be sensitive to the requirements of society.

Such a plan was closely followed in the government proposals of 1966, which sought to differentiate between degrees for tho e who wished to teach, and ordinary degrees - this plan, although an improvement, was unworkable, as is the more recent CFPM (see chapter 3) of Guichard, designed for the same purpose. The failure of attempts to transform the French universities suddenly, from being institutions above the day to day struggle for existence, into institutions geared to the immediate needs of French capitalism was too much of a strain. In Britain, the change was made more gradually, via the 'Redbrick' universities of the first half of the century; and consequently, the 'backlash' was less violent (only the LSE, Keele, Warwick and one or two other places being affected). In France, the revolt was widespread and devastating.

May 1968 began as a response to one small part of the transformation of French Higher education - Nanterre, epitomising all that was worst in the 'new university'. A forboding concrete and glass structure in the northern suburbs, set in one of the most poverty stricken areas of Paris, on an old air force base surrounded by mud and railway yards and the 'bidonvilles', shanty towns of corrogated iron where immigrant families live. The nearest station was appropriately called 'La Folie'. It is a reflection of the isolation of the Min. Ed. from student opinion and behaviour that such a place could ever have been built. 'La Folie' was

to imagine that students, a privileged and socially mobile class could be placed in a 'capsule' in a depressed and empoverished suburb and continue to work to serve the needs of a society which allows such areas to exist.

...Surgit Nanterre.

1968. Concrete and Glass; for the middle class of the 16th and 17th arrondissments, the rich residential areas of Paris, her mausoleums. And parking lots; lots of parking lots for the sons of the well to do, who live with the family and use mummy's car.

Around the campus, the Arab and Portuguese shantytown.

12.000 students. 1500 in residence. Dancing once a week, cineclub twice a week, and TV the other nights.
The rooms are good and sterilized; big glass windows overlooking the Arab barracks. No visits by 'foreigners' allowed, you can't add or change furniture, you cannot cook. No politics on the premises.

On the external walls: HERE FREEDOM STOPS ...

Trouble began over a number of things. Appropriately, with regard to the formation of Vincennes, a film was one of them. Students wanted to see a film of a strike. They were refused permission. For this and various other reasons, an occupation began. The rest of the story, the 22 Mars movement, Cohn-Bendit, the night of the barricades, the general strike and ultimately, de Gaulle's victory is well known, and not of immediate relevance here. What is important is the reaction to the events of the French establishment, and the government, once their precarious power base was secured. In particular, the Ministry of Education, now under Faure, the previous minister, Alain Peyrefitte having resigned in May. Something had to be done quickly over the long vacation, (from June to early November) to radically change the structure of French university education, for fear that the same thing would happen again. The result was that Vincennes was built.

Faure and the background to Vincennes

Edgar Faure has been described as, intellectually, the best Minister of Education any country has had for decades. Trained as a lawyer, he

had been actively involved in politics since the war, as well as having written extensively on philosophy, politics, law and education. Prior to the Min. Ed., he had been at the Ministry of Agriculture, the most demanding job in the cabinet apart from Prime Minister. His appointment to the Education ministry was suprising in several ways - a member of the Radical party, when the Gaullists were so strong as to have no need for coalition, and liberal in the extreme on educational matters, when many were crying out for law and order in the universities. Faure rejected demands for entry selection, and pressed for more interdisciplinary studies saying in the NationalAssembly that the time had come 'to abolish the traditional, almost sacramental divorce between the literary and the scientific'. Speaking of 'pluridisciplinite', Faure wrote 'seulement affirme-t-elle un choix: l'homme moderne n'est pas celui d'un discipline'[4] Faures' idea was for a radical change in the orientation of higher education in an attempt to create a new university of the twentieth century, to produce a new 'de-alienated' man.

The prime task was therefore to decentralise, and this was done by the 'loi d'orientation' which set up, in place of the old faculties, UERs (unites d'enseignement et recherches), encased in a new framework of autonomy; each UER had a staff-student council, which in turn was represented in the university council. The dictatorial powers of professors over their departments was therefore done away with in one swift motion, and a form of pseudo-democratic joint representation set up in their place. The law was passed in November. (By that time, Vincennes had already been built).

Each UER was designed so as to incorporate figures of around 500-2,000 students, and a few groups of researchers. The representatives were to be elected to councils, and the overall governing body of university education, itself elected, was the National University Council, including representatives from all facets of universities - administrative staff, and the Min. Ed. officials included.

The most important change however was that each university was to become autonomous, again with an ideal size of around 10.000 students. Immediately the law was passed, investigations into how the law could be effected were instigated - universities of over 30.000 students (Aix, Lille Grenoble, Nancy etc.) were split into 2 or 3 autonomous units, usually concerned mainly with science, law/social sciences and arts. For example, Grenoble I, II and III are respectively engineering, arts and social sciences. Paris was eventually split into 13, including several new faculties; Dauphine (Paris IX), Antony (Paris XI) and Vincennes (Paris VIII) being termed 'experimental'. Of the three, Vincennes is the only totally innovatory one; Dauphine and Antony are experimental in teaching methods alone and over a more narrow range of subjects.

The speed at which Vincennes was constructed is undoubtedly a world record in university building which is unlikely to be surpassed in the near future. The plans were completed in a week in early August 1968, the site chosen was an old artillery range owned by the City of Paris in the Bois de Vincennes. There was no time for formalities such as purchasing the land - it had taken 7 years to get land for the university of Paris North (Villetaneuse) - so orders to build were given. By the end of November, they were completed. All that was required was a 'university' to fill them.

The academic administration of Vincennes was given to the Dean of the Sorbonne, for initially it was planned that Vincennes be merely an annexe thereto. The Dean, Las Vergnas handed the task of designing the university over to 3 people - Pierre Dommergues, an English assistant, Helene Cixous, a lecturer at Nanterre, and Bernard Cassen, a specialist in Mass media studies. All were young, and filled with the idea of a 'revolutionary university', free from the exam system - a field for academic and political experiment.

Vincennes was deliberately designed so as to exclude theoretically the possibility of vast classes developping, by having rooms which would hold seminar classes of 20-30 people, and only 3 large theatres. In addition, the amount of money spent on equipment was larger proportionately than at most universities, allowing over 300 language laboratory places, and television and cinema equipment on a large scale. Complaints that this was excessive were overruled by Faure himself, in the 'interests of preserving autonomy'.

By January, Vincennes was ready to begin enrollment. What follows is basically a history of the university, and, via a study of the curriculum and its relationship to student politics, administrative difficulties and the bureaucracy/democracy conflict, an attempt at an explanation of what, if anything Vincennes has achieved, how far it is unique, whether it will ever be repeated, and ultimately, how far it has 'succeeded' or 'failed' by its own terms of refference; although both terms must be relative.

'Repenser l'enseignement, c'est repenser la societé, et les transformer tous les deux, l'un par l'autre'.

CENSIER, MAY '68

1 'Tomorrow's educa ion: the French experience' - Jean Capelle

2 ibid.

3 'The beginning of the end: France May '68' - Tom Nairn and Angelo Quattrocchi

4 'L'âme du combat' - Edgar Faure (Paris 1970)

"Ce qui me prit le plus au cours de ces quatre mois de 'Presidence' fut la tentative de vivre concretement une certaine idée de la democratie de laisser devenir realité de puissantes aspirations à une democratie totale". [1]

Thus writes Michel Beaud, former president of Vincennes in what is so far the only book written about the university. It is both a statement of ambition and a recognition of failure - as all the dozen or so presidents Vincennes has had in 4 years have failed. It is not, says Beaud a question of the 'ingovernability' of the students, staff or members of the administration , but simply that the government places the University in an impossible contradiction - by declaring Vincennes to be experimental and yet imposing restrictions, financial and censorial on every aspect of its development.

To a certain extent this is true, but the real failure of Vincennes obviously lies far deeper. Democracy, in the sense in which Beaud uses the word is unrealisable in any French University today. The struggle for democracy can be the only meaningful way in which Vincennes can survive, and the presidents, deans and other officials who have resigned after short terms of office have failed by abandonning the struggle in disillusion or cynicism. To understand the full implications of the possibilities for democracy at Vincennes, it is useful to look at both the formal mechanism of government and representation which exists; and to see how, over its history, conflicts have developped and been resolved. Only in relation to this basis can an appreciation of the potential of the university be arrived at.

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For the first 6 months after its completion in November '68, Vincennes ran without any 'government', apart from a small body of officials, the first elections not taking place until June 1969. It was in these early months thzt the conflicts over the purpose and potential of Vincennes were at their most volatile. An atmosphere of virtual 'anarchy now' existed, and according to Antony Sampson, following his experiences as a visiting teacher, the place was like a 24 hour street theatre of debate, demonstration and destruction.[2] Rooms were renamed and seized by 'les gauchistes' Assemble Generale (AG's) held for hours on end often 3 times a day, and in effect, the Sorbonne Soviet of May lived out for 6 months.

In some ways, this was what the government had wanted when Vincennes was set up - to provide a 'playground' for the less serious revolutionaries, who saw rhetoric and 'revolutionary' activity as ends in themselves. It was situated well away from the centre of Paris, so it could do little harm to the French economy, but also well away from the 'bidonvilles' or any working class areas - the only inhabitants of the Vincennes-St Mandé district are either very old or blind or both, and apart from a large Kodak factory, there is no heavy industry in the vincinity. As an extra 'safety feature', it was situated in the middle of the Bois de Vincennes surrounded by trees and wa te land.

The first attempts at ele tions were delayed when 'gauchistes' seized the unguarded ballot boxes and destroyed them. A week later, they were held again, with the ballot boxes protected by heavy CGT stewards from Renault to 'ensure democracy'. The poll was low - around 20%, but that was enough to establish the first council. It was also enough to ensure that the conflict between the Communist Party, representing the administration, and the 'gauchistes', the voice of most of the students, would be a permanent feature of life at Vincennes.

The betrayals of the PCF during May 1968, their refusal to support

even when they escalated into a general strike made them no friends of the Vincennes revolutionaries. And it is this antagonism which has been behind much of the conflict and disruption at the university. The fact that participation in the 'democratic' process of elections has been restricted to liberals and Communists means that Communists, being a more potent force have always been elected to the council. Those who have pressed for real democracy, in the form of a sovereign AG, as is nominally the case in English Students' Unions, have been defeated by the minority vote of those who participate in the farcical election procedure. It is important to remember that in France, the University and the Students' Union do not exist as two seperate institutions, or at least two bodies of opinion, as they do in England. The two main 'unions', the UNEF (Union National des Etudiants Francaises) and the FNEF (Federation National etc.), along with SNESup (University staff union) are not fully representative of student opinion, being only voluntary bodies, largely under the control of the PCF (except FNEF which is right wing, and orientated towards a form of 'student trades unionism' rather than a wider political struggle. There are no seperate union buildings - rather the coffee bars and communal areas become the centre of student activity during the midday period, and in a place like Vincennes, where political debate is going on during the whole day, it is impossible to draw a line between where student politics ends and university politics begins, short of the council.

"A University for the sons of the workers"

It was with this slogan that the PCF launched Vincennes. The basis was to be found in Article 23 of the Loi d'Orientation - "apres avoir reconnu leur aptitude, les universités organisent l'accueil de candidats déjà engagés dans la vie professionelle, qu'ils possèdent ou non des

titres universitaires." [3] 'L'ouverture aux non-bacheliers' was something totally new in French education, and one of the prime functions of the Vincennes experiment. The requirements for admission states that applicants must :

i have the baccalaureat

ii without the baccalaureat -

be over 24 OR

be over 20, having worked for at least 2 years

In addition, a test of suitability must be passed in the particular department chosen.

This innovation meant a number of departures from normal university practice. Vincennes is open from 8 in the morning until 10 or later at night to enable workers to come to evening classes. Also, worker-students and 'ordinary' students are in the same classes. This latter decision has caused some controversy at the Min. Ed., who have warned of the possibility of 'declining standards' - but as Vincennes has no standards which can be objectively measured to decline from, the critiscism can only imply a reluctance to allow the privilege of university education to be extended too far. At present, out of nearly 12.000 students, about 3-4.000 are part time professional people, and slightly less are workers taking evening courses - although a lot of the 'workers' are clerical workers, and as the figures are from PCF (Beaud) sources, they may be somewhat exaggerated.

Whatever the position may be, the actual workers were certainly not in evidence in the classes I attended, although they were admittedly not a representative cross-sample of the disciplines available, nor were they in the evening. Of the 30 or so students who were present in the cinema seminars most had no other occupation, and those in part time employment were using it as a supplement to parental contribution rather than a means in itself. (There are no students grants as such in France, and parents provide for all children under 21 - the cost of tuition however

is free). However, at one stage in 1969 40% of the students were workers of one sort or another.

Vincennes is the only university in France open to non-bacheliers, and even though only a small proportion of workers or apprentices actually take advantage of the fact, it is nevertheless a significant innovation. But much political capital is made out of the issue on both sides - consequently the figures are dubious and often difficult to obtain.

Conflict and strikes

The concept of a strike by students is different to that of a workers' strike, and is far more common in France than in England. Because of the position of students outside the means of production, strikes tend to be far more politically than economically motivated, and are a means more to draw attention to a problem than to solve it, which would often be an impossibility, given the balance of forces involved. Vincennes has in its short history been beset by numerous strikes, one of which took place during my visit, and which I will deal with in detail. Of the others, one in particular is worth mentioning.

In June 1971, there occured 3 strikes simultaneously; of the 'vacataires', temporary administrative staff and technicians engaged for the university year alone (7 months), of the technicians proper, and of the other office staff, the telephonists and secretaries.

The strike of the 'vacataires' posed more problems, since it was concerned with the whole issue of security of employment; an issue which had already been recognised by the university as being of fundamental importance, but which the Min. Ed. had so far declined to do anything about. The other 2 groups were striking more over conditions of work, although all 3 were also demanding salary increases.

The attitude of the Min. Ed. was twofold. On the one hand, they complained that staff at Vincennes went on strike too easily, and on the other hand, that as Vincennes was autonomous, it could easily grant

all the demands. However, the financial resources to do so, and to create new administrative posts removing some of the burden from the already overworked staff, were not forthcoming.

Basically the problem was the same one that has always troubled Vincennes - a starvation of funds and equipment from the ministry, especially during times of trouble. It is a reflection of the impossible situation that the council, and the PCF are in - for, on the one hand they say that Vincennes is unworkable, and is being wrecked by the 'gauchistes'; if they would co-operate, all would be well. On the other, they realise that the government has it in its power to make a mockery of the nominal autonomy at Vincennes, at the expense on this occasion of the least deserving elements, the administrative and technical staff.

The conditions negotiated by the council were eventually:-

4.000 sq. m. of new buildings to be built.

40 new administrative posts to be created.

10 new 'vacataires' to be appointed.

'recognition of the experimental nature of Vincennes' bythe National University Council.

Minimum salary of 1000F per month for all personell.

'guarantees' for all temporary staff.

The council and the unions (UNEF/SNESup/CGT alliance) accused the strikers of intimidation, obstinacy and seeking to wreck the Vincennes experiment.

The strike committee claimed it had provided UV certificates to all students who needed them, had dealt with essential administrative functions and had had to enforce militant pickets to prevent 'travail jaune' (scabs) being employed. They claimed that the council had refused to allow them to sign the 'agreed conditions' - that in effect it was the council which was preventing Vincennes from functioning, in order to discredit the 'gauchistes'.

A return to work was eventually agreed upon after over 4 months, before the beginning of term. However, there is no sign as yet of the new buildings promised, and the position of the vacataires is still in the balance.

It was over similar issues that the strike in April 1972 occured during my visit - for although other factors sparked it off and reinforced it, basically the strike was not so much over a direct wages or conditions issue as over the deprivation of funds to Vincennes by the government. The two issues mainly responsible for reinforcing the will to strike (which appeared to be virtually 100% solid, at least among the students) were

i) a report which appeared in France-Soir suggesting that Vincennes would be pulled down by 1978 as the City of Paris wanted its land back. (This has since been virtually confirmed, although at the time it was merely rumour. I will deal with it further in the final chapter.) Consequently liberals leaft to the 'defence of Vincennes' as the prime motive for action.

ii) the Paris police closed another university, Censier in the heart of the Latin Quarter. Allegedly, the reasons were that it had become a centre for drug-dealing and was overrun by 'le souk' - pedlars, buskers and other forms of vagrant life, especially those demanding meal tickets for the subsidised university canteens, and using force to get them. The situation was such, the police and university authorities claimed that students were unable to work, for fear of the degenerates and ruffians who preyed on their privileges. This was partly true - however, a more likely reason for the closure was that Censier was the political centre for 'spontaneistes', direct conflict revolutionaries, and there had been sporadic street fighting with police.

Student discontent was particularly high all over France at this time because of the recently published government proposals for teacher training the CFPM (Centre de formation des professeurs et maitres). Basically, the

purpose of these proposals was, at the end of the 2nd year at university to select those students who intended to do teacher training, and move them into 'centres' which would be part of the faculties, and not seperate institutions as they were before. In effect, this was a form of belated selection, a political filter, since students not entering a CPFM would not recieve a full licence and so would be excluded from teaching - hence virtually all students would have to present themselves for selection, and 80% would be refused. The project would do nothing to solve the problem of the 'charge des cours', assistant university staff hired for the university year alone, similar to the vacataires - and it was these people who were a major cause of discontent at Vincennes and elsewhere. Smaller strikes and stoppages occured all over Paris and elsewhere during early 1972 in protest against the plans, but it was the April strikes and the closure of Censier which caused the most publicity - and led to the most widespread street fighting since May '68 with the police forcibly entering a university campus (Paris VIII - Jussieu) for the first time since then.

The pattern of the strike at Vincennes was that there were large strike meetings of up to 1000 people most days, at which professors, students and administrative staff of all shades of revolutionary opinion spoke at great length, a march through Paris of about 3.000 which coincided with the police attack on Jussieu and so was less impressive than it might have been - and token pickets sometimes, which had little effect, and were unnecessary anyway in that noone appeared to be trying to attend courses.

The strike received press coverage, as Le Monde devotes a whole page to university news every day. It quoted a communique from the council:

'le budget de fonctionnement est resté presque inchangé depuis 1968, alors que le nombre d'etudiants est passé de 7 mille a 12.500 .... et ne tient aucun compte de l'augmentation du cout de la vie et des lourdes depenses de personell payées sur le budget de l'université.' 4

However, the failure of such action at Vincennes, for it can hardly be said to have been a successful strike in that 'normalisation' begun after about 3 weeks, was that when Vincennes stopped working, noone was affected. As C. Driver says, 'teaching is secondary, research must be done elsewhere, Vincennes is successful because it exists'.[5] And when it ceases to 'exist', it fails, and noone notices its failure because it does nothing, apart from what its members do. The canteen, the worst in Paris by far, still functioned, and no doubt the canteen staff were far more badly treated than the students and 'agregées' on strike, but noone worried about them. The crêche, 'la crêche sauvage', a novel innovation for a university in France, and included because of the number of married and working students expected appeared to be open. And the coffee bars were full at all hours of the day, as were the corridors with bookstalls pancake sellers and 'le souk'. Militant action at Vincennes which stops short of violent revolution will always fail, because it is in noones immediate interest to do anything about it.

1 'Vincennes An III' - Michel Beaud

2 'The New Student Battlefield' - Anthony Sampson, The Observer 3·8·69

3 'Loi d'orientation' - November 1968

4 'Le Monde' - 20·4·72

5 'The Exploding University' - Christopher Driver

Most writers on the subject of the curriculum have concerned themselves exculsively with the school curriculum, and is such a way as to make their applicability to the curriculum in higher education difficult. The difference between shcool and university curricula is that in the former, the burden is far more on the teacher for discipline and organisation - whereas in the university, it is merely the knowledge which is organised. In any case, at a university such as Vincennesm where student participation, both in government , and management of the curriculum is very high, most theories relating to school or even university curricula would be far from fully applicable.

Two quotations emphasise this difference. The one from Bernstein:

'Formal educational knowlege can be considered to be realised through three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realisation of this knowledge on the part of the taught. The term "educational knowledge code" .... refers to the underlying principles which shape curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation.'[1]

The other from the sylabus of the dept. of education at Vincennes:

'(cette UV a pour but)... l'analyse du systeme scolaire dans la formation sociale francaise en tant que systeme separe (des forces productives) ayant pour fonction la reproduction des rapports sociaux de production. Cet objective implique qu'on soumette à une critique systematique les notions de reference commune des "sciences de l'education", telles que "education", "instruction", "pedagogie", "planification", "democratisation" "innovation" etc. pour en devoiler le contenu de classe et la reference à l'ideologie dominante.'[2]

The Vincennes curriculum has therefore transcended Bernstein's terms of reference subjectively, if not objectively. Because of its social situation, it can do no more, and whether it does in fact achieve all that the syallabus claims is questionable. However, to analyse how a curriculum maintains the dominant ideology and perpetuates the class system, when this is in fact the whole content of the curriculum is a tautological circle.

Bernstein defines the curriculum as a division of time into periods, and the relationship between the units of time and their content. He then

goes on to distinguish between two types of curriculum - collection type, and integrated type. A collection type exists where contents of each curriculum are 'closed', that is where boundaries between subjects are rigid and administratively defined - a student therefore has to 'collect a group of favoured contents in order to satisfy some criteria of evaluation', to become an 'educated' or 'skilled' man. The integrated type, which of the two is closest to the situation at Vincennes, envisages a more open situation in which the contents of each course are less rigidly defined. The extent to which the course contents are rigidly boundaried is termed 'classification'.

However, from then onwards, Bernstein's definitions and models become less useful - for, since he is primarily concerned with the school curriculum, an integrated type is said always to be based on teachers, within a subject or across different subjects. European curricula are loosely described as being non-specialised subject based collection types - and in the case of the French schools system, this is true. Until recently, it was possible for the Minister of Education to know that at a dertain time, every child of a particular age in France would be reading a particular chapter of the same book. This is hardly the case in higher education, and certainly not at Vincennes.

Curriculum structure

The curriculum at Vincennes follows from a structural point of view the pattern of all French universities since the 1968 'Loi d'orientation'. That is, each department constitutes a 'unité d'enseignement et de recherche' (UER) and each course therein a 'unité de valeur' (UV). The regulations of the university state simply:

Licence = 30 UV
L'UV = un theme de travail qui represente environ trois heures de prescence hebdomadaire a Vincennes.

Organisation de la licence à reglementation nationale
- 30 UV à repartir comme suite;
20 en dominante
10 en sous-dominante

Le diplome de licence n'est delivré qu'au bout de 5 semestres.

The division of work into a minimum 3 year period is such therefore that nominally, 18 hours of work a week are required. As most classes are 3 hours, this implies 1 or 2 seminars a day. All students have to study a modern language as part of their course, dominant or supplementary. Apart from that, the choice of subjects of study is virtually free. All classes are open to anyone, registered or not, and during a 3 hour seminar the composition of the class can vary considerably in numbers and type.

Michel Beaud, in his book on Vincennes lists 3 ways at least in which Vincennes is unique - interdisciplinarité, critique and novations pedagogique.

'Interdisciplinarity', as distinct from pluri- or multidisciplinarity implies course integration, and freedom to mix courses at will. 'Les étudiants, eux, suivent des UV dans plusieurs departements, apportaient dans chacun les problematiques, les "regards" et les "discours" des autres departments'[4]

The breadth of field of certain courses encourages students from all disciplines to follow them - for example, 'Literature et societé', 'Le cafe comme lieu socio-culturel', and 'Le problème de l'Utopié aujourd'hui' from, respectively, the departments of sociology, cinema and philosophy would appeal to a far wider range of interests than is merely encompassed by the departmental definition.

'L'université doit faire connaitre aux etudiants la societé ou ils vivent afin de leur permettre de l'ameliorer'[5] - this function, a total critique of society is certainly fulfilled by the curriculum at Vincennes. It is not merely, as Faure and Guichard would have liked it to be, the conscience of society - a university <u>does</u> perform its critical function, whether or not the critiscism is accepted by society, for if the critiscism is constructive, it will not be accepted by society if it envisages changes beyond the scope of the existing social order. A survey of the list of courses in, for example, the department of philosophy suggests a total critique of society beyond the bounds that coulud possibly be acceptable

to the Min. Ed. :-

le probleme palistinien, la theorie proletarienne de la connaisance, de la nature des états ouvriers, le jeune Trotsky, l'Irlande, la conception homosexuelle du monde, les ideaux de la bourgeoisie apres 1945, appareils et forces politiques, structure de l'extreme gauche en France.

'Dans une societe en crise, la connaisance est revolutionaire et un gouvernemente ne peut qu'etre en conflit avec son université'.6

Teaching innovations are mainly in the form of work exclusively in small groups,. encouraging total participation - although classes intended to be 20 or so end up as 50 on frequent occasions. Bacheliers and non-bacheliers mix in the same classes. In order to accomodate the increase in student numbers, it has been necessary to increase teaching hours from 8 in the morning until 10 at night rather than compromise on teaching methods.

The amount of time actually spent on courses, as distinct from that recorded in terms of the requirement for the UV can vary enormously from department to department and teacher to teacher. Students in the dept. of philosophy told me that if one is of similar political persuasion to one's tutor, and you both agree that class struggle is best carried on in the factory rather than the university, then it is possible to be promised the necessary certificate at the end of the year, without having to attend a single seminar or do any academic work. In many other departments, rules are similarly lax, since on the whole, the staff are as politically active as the students.

In fact, such is tha lack of 'academic discipline' in some departments, notably philosophy, that they have been deprived of the power to give state diplomas, or 'licences d'enseignement' by the Min. Ed. Instead, they can only give 'licences libres', free degrees which, interms of economic or social weight are virtually worthless. The introduction of this form of political censorship by Oliver Guichard, Minister of Education 2 years ago was greeted not by an occupation of the Ministry of Education, as one

might have imagined, but of the Directorat de l'Education Surveillé (approved schools and probation service) to the cries of "nous sommes tous en education surveillé! "

The situation now is that the departments of mathematics, politics, economics, French, philosophy and psychoanalysis have been deprived of the power to give full licences - while the departments of cinema, theatre and urbanism have never been recognised at all. In fact, it is only the traditional university subjects which can give licences d'enseignement, and some of them, notably sociology and geography ar in danger of losing the right.

Two departments

i. Cinema

The department of Cinema is a speciality of Vincennes. In England, there are no university courses on cinema, and in France it is only possible to study it to degree level in a few places. However, cinema as an art is far more widely appreciated in France than elsewhere, and it is therefore held on a par with music and art as a course worthy of study, the seventh art. French cinema has always been bound up with current philosophical and political connotation; and France has produced some of the greatest directors in specialised 'art cinema'. There are more books and magazines on cinema in French than in any other language, dealing with theoretical and philosophical aspects of film, as well as reviews and commercial news. Cinema is an integral part of the life of young people in France far more than elsewhere, and so many of them wish to study it in depth.

How then is cinema'studied' at Vincennes - and what distinguishes the curriculum of the dept. of dinema at Vincennes from that, for example, at the IDHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques), which is frequently critiscised in Vincennes publicity.

'les discours qu'il s'agira d'analyser et de critiquer cette année n'appartiennent pas ... au domaine de la 'critique' ... mais sont des manuels d'enseignement (IDHEC, CICF etc.)

The difference lies in conceptions of aesthetics, 'montage' (editing and presentation) and 'objectivity in cinema'. The syllabi for the various UV differentiate between an idealist approach, and a dialectical materialist approach - the one relying on continutiy, imperceptible changes of shot and the construction of an ''alternative reality' (une espace-temps referentiel), and the other a presentation of the real world. To quote from Vertov, one of the pioneers of Soviet cinema,

'Dans le cinematographe artistique, il est convenu de sous-entendre par montage le collage de scenes filmees separement, en fonction d'un scenario plus ou moins elaboré par un metteur en scene. Les kinoks donnent au montage une signification absolument differente, et l'entendent comme l'organisation du monde visible ... le montage est ininterrompu depuis la première observation, jusqu'au filme definitif'[8]

The whole conception of cinema at Vincennes is of a weapon - 'le cinema est un instrument de la lutte des classes' - as Lenin said, cinema is the most revolutionary of all art forms. Therefore debate centres round the issue of what is proletarian cinema, and how does one translate Marxist, (predominantly Maoist) theory into cinematographic practice.

UV fall into 3 groups:

- UV on the history, philosophy and theory of cinema, e.g. Cinema et front paysan, Armons-nous ideologiquement pour la critique revolutionaire, cinema de propagande, cinema militant de fiction, representation politique, Hollywoodisme et comedie musicale etc.
- UV on methodology, e.g. Montage, methodologié, stage technique audio-visuel, travail de la bande son, sur les practiques cinematographiques, etc.
- UV which concentrate on making specific films e.g. Luttes sur le front ideologique, travailleurs immigrés, la couleur, problemes du court-metrages, etc.

Although the fields of the UVs inevitably overlap considerably, there is a fairly clear distinction between the technical and philosophical side of film making. I attended classes in both fields - one on 'Cinema militant du fiction' involved a 3 hour discussion in a group of 20 or so students over Eisenstein, and the nature of proletarian, as opposed to

bourgeois fiction. Another, under the title 'Travailleurs immigrés' dealt with actually planning the making of a film; the problems of immigrant workers, how they could best be represented on film, and more technical matters such as montage, sound mixing and overall presentation. Whether or not the film was actually made is not important - as Vincennes' resources are stretched to the limit, few films are actually made which recieve circulation outside the faculty. Rather, it is the way that the curriculum brings together revolutionary theory and concrete practice in the production, or planned production of an art form that is its purpose.

ii. Anglo-American

The English and American studies dept. at Vincennes is one of the most typical and significant for several reasons. Firstly, a great deal of English is spoken at Vincennes, and there used to be a considerable number of English teachers in all departments, although this is not still the case. Secondly, it is one of the largest and most influential departments because although radical, it has not been deprived of the power to give full degrees. This is not of great interest to the students, but important to to council, who try to maintain an air of respectability in Vincennes' reputation. Thirdly, the range of UVs available, and the way in which they cover all facets of English and American life, history and culture are representatitive of the best Vincennes has achieved.

The linguistics and language side of the course is not particularly striking or innovatory - teaching is mainly by language laboratory, and the syllabus is much as it might be in any modern university.

However, it is the litterature and civilisation side which is important. In the case of both England and the USA, it covers history and the development of art and culture - with UVs such as 'les mouvements ouvriers du mid-Victorianisme'. 'les debuts du welfare state', and 'les luttes politiques du debut du XXieme siecle' - and also modern Britain and America, 'the crisis of liberal capitalism', 'the changing class structure' and 'the legitimisation

of Western values'. On the literature side, black american writers, the exile tradition in Irish literature and English working-class culture are typical of the UVs available.

Several prominent English writers have taught at the department - Anthony Sampson for example, who/came to teach British politics in 1969 'and, as he put it "just be around". This kind of innovation was revolutionary for France - what! a foreign journalist presuming to French academic wisdom? '[9]

Other English teachers include Jim Haynes, founder of the underground magazine, IT. Two young teachers I spoke to had been at Vincennes since it opened, and had become 'charges du cours' with only a first degree from an English university. In the early days, it was easy for foreigners to obtain posts, but now it is far more difficult. Both were teaching in the English civilisation section, on such subjects as Ireland, the Labour Party and Trades Unions since the war. Also teaching in the department were the 2 'founders' of Vincennes, Pierre Dommergues and Bernard Cassen.

The curriculum at Vincennes therefore represents an attempt to obtain a total perspective on subjects not merely in the abstract, but in a relative sense - the background is always historical, the method dialectical and the essential unity of theory and practice stressed. In other universities, to bring a discussion of the class struggle into a seminar of modern theatre would be regarded as a diversion - at Vincennes, any course devoid of politics would be inconceivable. It is for these reasons that Vincennes has been under such pressure, both academic and financial from the Min. Ed. - and yet at the same time, because Vincennes is isolated and unique, it is relatively harmless.

One can draw several lessons for the sociology of education in general from a study of Vincennes. The most important is a re-appraisal of the whole purpose and potential of university education. It is evident that the normal epithets of 'an education factory', or 'a fountain of pure

learning above the day to day reality of life' do not fit. The need is for a greater understanding of the integral relationship of students to society, not merely to the university and its curriculum. A university curriculum cannot exist without the students, teachers and administrators who formulated it - and it cannot exist outside the structure of the university. Therefore, theories not related to the structure and purpose of educational institutions in their historical and social settings, and the social position of students are valueless as models. Because Vincennes is unique in a number of ways, it is difficult to fit it into conventional analysis patterns. But it is sociology, not the university which is at fault.

1 'Class codes and control' - B.Bernstein

2 'Syllabus of UER education' - Univ. of Paris VIII (Vincennes)

3 'Conditions d'inscription ' - " " "

4 'Vincennes - an III' - Michel Beaud

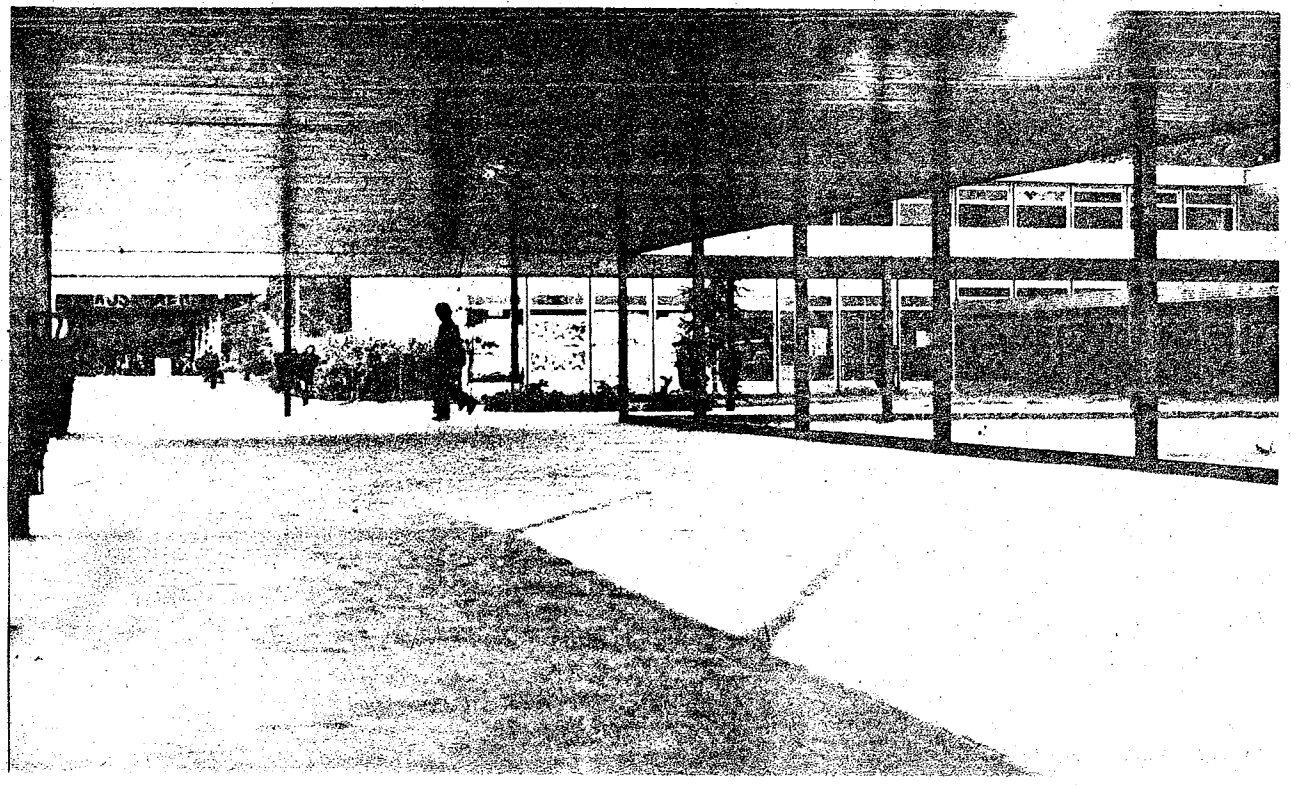
5 ibid,

6 ibid.

7 'Syllabus of UER Cinema' - Vincennes

8 quoted in above (7)

9 'The New France' - John Ardagh



The future of Vincennes has always been in the balance, as has every aspect of its development. It leads a precarious life, existing only for the present in its present form, and accepting innovations, or innovating as the case may be, from day to day, balanced between its revolutionary aspirations and the realities of the world outside - the Min. Ed, lack of resources and public opinion. It is frequently in the news, especially during the early years, although now people tend to dismiss it as a playground for the self-appointed proletarians in the middle of nowhere - 'Ah, Vincennes - c'est une probleme psychologique ! according to a taxi driver, reported in Anthony Sampson's article[1]. Vincennes today is the epitomy of all that was worst about the student movement of the late 60's, its empty rhetoric, premature revolutionary fervour and distance from the material world. What good points there may have been, are now rapidly disappearing, or being done away with. As Daniele Granet remarked coldly in l'Express earlier this year, 'Vincennes n'a plus d'experimental que le nom'[2]. This is an oversimplification, but the plain truth is that more and more, Vincennes is becoming similar to any other university - or is it that other universities are becoming similar to Vincennes ?

'Les authorités gouvernamentales desirent en finir avec "l'experience de Vincennes": telle est ma conviction'. This, if Michel Beaud is to be believed is the future for Vincennes - either it will be normalised, or closed down altogether. The latter is perhaps a bit unlikely, especially in the short run, because of the wave of protest from all quarters that would follow. But a passive form of 'normalisation' has been occurring for the last few years, in that more and more, Vincennes is becoming thought of as 'une université comme les autres' in teaching methods, if not administration - and the administration is becoming inefficient, financially bankrupt and overworked, and so uncreditworthy. To formally

announce the end of the experimental university of Paris VIII would therefore at this stage be an unnecessary move. Rather, the ministry intends to let it stagnate to such an extent that it can be quietly done away with.

As mentioned earlier, Vincennes was built on 'stolen' land, in that the City of Paris authorities were not consulted before the building went ahead. Consequently, although nothing much was done at the time, legal proceedings have been going on, with out much publicity. The result was that earlier this year, France Soir was able to publish, presumably with some basis in fact, that the University of Vincennes would be pulled down by 1978. This has since been virtually confirmed, although as a visiting German professor remarked, it will be unnecessary, as the students will themselves have destroyed it by then. In fact, the site was leased on a 5 year contract - so there is one year in which the future will be decided.

What then have been the failings of Vincennes from the point of view of all concerned. From the Ministry of Education, the answer is not hard to find. Originally set up as a filter to take the most violent revolutionary elements from the rest of Paris, it fulfilled its function to a certain extent - but only in so far as, and as long as the student revolutionaries were prepared to limit their horizons to battles with the authorities and 'les flics'. When the struggle moved to other fronts Vincennes as a political safety valve was useless. Students would sign on there and instead of following courses, would infiltrate other Paris universities, or agitate in the factories and immigrant communities. The freedom allowed to Vincennes was working against its instigators - the students were beginning to twist the arm of the government. The response has been normalisation, stifling of growth, and starvation of funds - generally, letting Vincennes run itself down.

For the Communist Party, the governing body of the University, the failure of Vincennes has been due to the fact that their vision of the

university was idealised, impractical, and shared by few. The 'enemies of Vincennes' numbered the Min. Ed. and the government, who deprived them of funds, and on the other side, the 'gauchistes', who, by refusing to co-operate with the bureaucracy were seeking to 'wreck the experiment'. To expect that a liberal ideologically untainted university can exist in Gaullist France is an illusion - the PCF and its trade union allies who run Vincennes have fallen prey to that illusion, and in desperation, can only blame ill will on all sides.

And as for the students, the failure is that they sought initially to make Vincennes a 'red base' totally cut off from the realities of society. Anthony Sampson describes an amusing scene during the elections of June 1969 :-

'...This time, the Communists took no chances; they secretly summoned 200 tough young Communists from the factories, who arrived at Vincennes the night before...
It was a strange apparition: here, in the midst of the campus where there had been so much talk about the class struggle, was a gang of real workers, solid men with rough hands. They looked round at the more obscene posters with disgust, and tore them down...'[2]

The ideology, not only of the French bourgeoisie, but also of the class conscious workers was a long way from that of the Vincennes revolutionaries. And when it became evident that the dream of a revolutionary paradise was a myth, the Vincennes experiment was, for them, over. The more serious among them turned to more fruitful methods of continuing the struggle - the rest turned to pop culture, drugs, or merely became apathetic.

Vincennes is unlikely to be repeated. In retrospect, it was politically a response by the establishment to May 1968 - behind all the rhetoric about the university of the future, and education for the sons of the workers, the underlying purpose was to cool the tense situation, and disillusion the hordes of prospective revolutionaries. A revolutionary situation can only continue to exist while a crisis exists, and develops. Vincennes was an unreal crisis, which remained static, and so would eventually burn itself out. Far better for the French government to divert students' energy into

an artificially constructed crisis than let them dabble in real ones.

French society has changed remarkably little since 1968. Apart from Paris, Grenoble and a few other places sporadically, the universities are quiet. And the visions of Vincennes as the last bastion of the revolution have gone. For the rest, no-one is affected by it much any more.

> Sorbonne (Vincennes?), citadel of the red flag,
> hostage of a dream, now defenceless.
>
> Workers back to factories, owned by capital
>
> selling labour in order to buy bread
>
> the rest is invisible, in peoples minds
>
> the price of bread goes up by 5 centimes.[3]

1 'The new student battlefield' - Anthony Sampson, Observer 3.8.69

2 ibid.

3 'France May 1968' - Tom Nairn and Angelo Quattriocchi

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David Evans, December 1972