

Module 05: 1968 — A Generation in Revolt?

Evidence 10: Interview of Daniel Cohn-Bendit by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, May 20, 1968

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Introduction

Student Movement leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit conducted an interview with Jean-Paul Sartre in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on May 20, 1968.

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The workers will obtain satisfaction on a certain number of material claims and the important university reforms will be determined by the moderate tendencies of the student movement and by the professors. It won't be the radical reforms that we would wish, but we will have a certain influence all the same: we will make precise propositions and they will undoubtedly accept some of them because they dare not refuse us all. It will be progress, to be sure, but nothing fundamental will change and we will continue to challenge the system as a whole.

In any case, I don't believe that the revolution is possible, as it is, today or tomorrow. I believe that one can obtain only successive improvements, more or less important, but these improvements could only be imposed by the revolutionary actions. It is in this that the student movement, which will have succeeded in an important reform of the university, even if it temporarily loses its energy, will serve as an example for many young workers. In utilizing the traditional means of action of the workers' movement – the strike, the occupation of the streets and places of work –, we made the jump over the first obstacle: the myth according to which "nothing can be done against this regime". We have proven that this isn't true. And the workers are engulfed in the breach. Perhaps they will not go this time, until the end. But there will be other explosions, much later. Significantly, it is the demonstration that has shown the efficacy of revolutionary methods.

Source: "L'Imagination au pouvoir : Entretien de Jean-Paul Sartre avec Daniel Cohn-Bendit," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, special supplement (20 May 1968). Translated by Robert Stephens.