

Why May '68 in France Faltered— The Logistical Limits of a Libertarian Utopia

Gilles Paché
CERGAM
Aix-Marseille University

The success and longevity of large-scale social movements depend not only on the strength of their ideologies or the intensity of their demands, but also on their ability to organize, sustain, and adapt logistical support for participants. Using the May '68 movement in France as an analytical lens, this article examines the material foundations of protest—such as food, shelter, and medical care—as critical factors that can either reinforce collective resilience or accelerate a movement's decline. It argues that managing flows is not a peripheral concern but a structuring element that remains too often overlooked in scholarly analysis. By bridging the sociology of social movements with the field of logistics management, the article reveals a persistent blind spot in conventional approaches: the strategic importance of resources and their circulation in sustaining activist engagement. This materialist reinterpretation of protest invites a rethinking of mobilization not only as an ideological endeavor, but also as an operational one—rooted in the anticipation, coordination, and distribution of essential flows capable of accommodating organizational complexity, actors' diversity, and shifting conditions on the ground.

Keywords: contention, imaginary utopia, logistics, mobilization, protest, resource management, social movements

INTRODUCTION

The May '68 protest movement in France did not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, it reflected a much broader wave of dissent that swept across several Western countries during the same period. In the United States, the 1960s were marked by a widespread revolt against governmental authority, epitomized by student protests against the Vietnam War, a deeply controversial military engagement. These protests, including landmark events such as the occupation of Columbia University in 1968 and the massive demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that same year, denounced a foreign policy widely viewed as illegitimate and morally indefensible. In Europe, student movements have found a powerful resonance. In Germany, the *Studentenbewegung* mobilized young people in search of alternative ideologies, rejecting authoritarianism and confronting the unacknowledged legacy of the Nazi past—a phenomenon thoroughly analyzed by Marwick (2011). In Italy, protests quickly expanded beyond university campuses to include workers and broader population segments demanding social justice, democratic reform, and economic equality. All these mobilizations can be situated within the broader framework of the emergence of a Western counterculture, a transformative phenomenon explored by Roszak (1995 [1969]).

A key similarity between the May '68 movement in France and contemporaneous protests in other countries lies in their capacity to unite diverse social groups around shared demands. In France, these mobilizations resonated particularly strongly in a political context dominated by a seemingly unshakable right-wing government under President Charles de Gaulle. Initially focused on living and studying conditions in universities, student demands rapidly expanded to encompass broader political and social issues. The movement reached an unprecedented scale with the outbreak of general strikes that paralyzed the country, disrupting major sectors such as the automotive and transport industries. Nearly ten million workers participated—a record that underscored the depth of public discontent. Yet this massive mobilization faced a fundamental limitation: the absence of a coherent logistical strategy. As Kurlansky (2005) observes, enthusiasm and militant energy were significantly undermined by structural disorganization. In both Germany and Italy, protest movements encountered similar obstacles, including poor coordination among activist groups and organizational weaknesses (Caute, 1988). Despite their intensity, these movements ultimately failed to produce enduring change. Their shared inability to translate protest into a cohesive political project represents a critical weakness—an enduring obstacle to consolidating lasting institutional power.

The disappointment of the May '68 movement cannot be attributed solely to material limitations; it must also be analyzed through the lens of the organizational challenges inherent in large-scale social movements. Although youthful utopian visions propelled the protests, they often lacked the structural foundations necessary to ensure their long-term sustainability and coherence. In the United States, anti-Vietnam War protests—despite the backing of structured activist groups—struggled to maintain enduring support, as Gitlin (1993) underscores in his study of 1960s-era social movements. In Europe, even where powerful militant and union structures existed—such as the French Communist union (CGT)—they often failed to mobilize society or provide consistent logistical support throughout prolonged periods of unrest. As a result, the May '68 movement, which initially signaled the possibility of profound social transformation, quickly encountered its limits in the everyday management of strikes, occupations, and rapidly evolving protest sites. The article draws on a wide range of academic books to explore this often-overlooked dimension of protest, a method strongly recommended by Alvesson & Kärreman (2012) for enabling creative and theoretically informed data mining. These scholarly works strengthen the validity of this analysis by identifying organizational fragilities as a central factor contributing to collective disillusionment and unmet expectations.

AN IMAGINARY “REVOLUTION”

The May 1968 movement in France is often remembered as an imagined “revolution,” characterized by a surge of popular protest against the established order (Seidman, 2004), marked by a huge diversity of participants in terms of religion, gender, class origin, and sexual orientation. Beyond its ideological and political significance, however, the movement revealed fundamental logistical challenges that ultimately limited its scope and longevity. While improvisation enabled rapid and forceful mobilization, it also exposed the vulnerabilities of a movement unable to meet the growing material demands of sustained protest. Operating in a context where protest actions were largely voluntary, informal, and decentralized, the distribution of essential resources—such as food, communication tools, medical aid, and logistical coordination—was frequently disorganized, fragile, and inadequate. Drawing on the dynamics of the May '68 mobilization, this article examines how even a movement animated by powerful ideals and broad participation can be significantly constrained by the absence of structured systems for managing material needs and logistical flows. Despite its undeniable transformative energy, the movement lacked the infrastructural foundation necessary to translate mass mobilization into lasting political change—ultimately undermining the far-reaching transformation its participants sought to achieve.

Force Without Structure

The May '68 movement in France erupted amid intense social and political tensions, as a disillusioned and defiant youth demanded a radical departure from the established order. The most emblematic events—

including university occupations, mass demonstrations, and a general strike that brought the country to a standstill—represented an unprecedented form of spontaneous protest (for an overview of the key events of May ‘68, see Table 1). These actions reflected a deep desire to reject the prevailing social and political hierarchy, and were driven by principles of self-management, individual freedom, and collective solidarity. As Morin *et al.* (2008 [1968]) observe, the movement's strength lay in its capacity to openly challenge traditional power structures, bypassing conventional institutional channels and standard forms of protest. Yet this “revolutionary” momentum was significantly undermined by a stark lack of infrastructure and organizational coherence. Despite the creativity and imagination displayed by many activists, their efforts were hindered by minimal coordination and limited access to stable material resources. Demonstrations and occupations were often improvised, carried out with urgency and conviction, but without the strategic planning required to sustain momentum over time. This weakness in logistical capacity ultimately restricted the movement’s ability to evolve beyond isolated, spontaneous actions, thereby limiting its potential to achieve lasting societal transformation.

TABLE 1
KEY EVENTS OF MAY ‘68 IN FRANCE AND THEIR MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Key event	Date	Main characteristic
Student protests erupt at Nanterre University (about 12 km from downtown Paris)	May 3	Sparked by student opposition to traditional university structures and authoritarianism
Sorbonne University in the center of Paris closed by authorities	May 6	Escalated tensions between students and government; symbol of repression
Violent clashes between students and police in the Latin Quarter	Night of May 10–11*	Marked a turning point with nationwide media attention and public sympathy for students
General strike begins, involving over 10 million workers	May 13–14	Largest general strike in French history; extended the movement beyond universities
Renault factory at Boulogne-Billancourt occupied	May 16	Symbol of worker solidarity and occupation of key industrial sites
Government begins to lose control over public services	Mid-May	State institutions and infrastructure significantly paralyzed
Grenelle Agreements negotiated between government and unions	May 25–27	Attempt to resolve crisis with major labor concessions (wage increases, union rights)
President de Gaulle disappears briefly to consult military leaders in Germany	May 29	Political crisis deepens; rumors of a coup or President de Gaulle’s resignation circulate
Pro-Gaullist demonstration on Champs-Élysées	May 30	Massive counter-mobilization in support of order and the French Republic
Progressive return to work and end of movement	Early June	Beginning of the end for the libertarian utopia and the return to order in universities

*Called “*Night of the Barricades*”

Source: The author.

From the outset of the May ‘68 movement, the student revolt was hindered by the absence of essential organizational infrastructure—even though, as Tilly (1978) reminds us, the success of social protests

critically depends on the development of strong networks, effective communication channels, and dependable logistical systems that can sustain collective action over time. Although action committees were indeed formed, they emerged spontaneously and could not manage operations over the long term. Barricades, hastily assembled by demonstrators, were often swiftly dismantled by police forces, and the distribution of food and supplies to occupied universities was disorganized, relying primarily on ad hoc donations. Ross (2004) observes that while such improvisation can temporarily fuel momentum, it ultimately falls short of meeting the practical demands of thousands of participants. As daily life in occupied spaces became increasingly difficult, the absence of structured logistical support made it impossible to ensure even minimal comfort. This operational weakness significantly curtailed the movement's reach and longevity, which gradually lost momentum due to its inability to provide the material foundations essential for sustained protest.

Illusion of Self-Sufficiency

The insurgents of May '68 brought with them a utopian vision of self-sufficiency, conceived not only as symbolic independence but also as a means of liberating themselves from the State, hierarchies, and established power structures. This pursuit aligns with what Illich (2001 [1973]) would later describe as the *aspiration for autonomous subsistence*, which seeks the maximum reduction of institutional dependencies. The ideology of immediate autonomy is reflected in a deep-seated mistrust of structured logistics, which was seen as a compromise with the old order. The rejection of traditional forms of organization, viewed as tools of domination, manifested in the desire to operate outside any institutional mediation. However, as McAdam *et al.* (2001) argue, a sustainable social movement requires control over material flows and logistical resources to support its actions. The illusion of total material autonomy, theorized by Scott (2020 [1998]) through the concept of *infra-political resistance*, soon proves untenable: without organization, collective survival becomes increasingly precarious. The effort to forgo support structures led to the fragmentation of collective action, and the early days of the May '68 movement revealed that permanent improvisation quickly confronted the inability to meet the basic needs of student demonstrators and strikers. Ultimately, pursuing autonomy without organization became a significant obstacle to the movement's sustainability.

By impacting the entirety of France, the strikes and transport paralysis immediately affected the supply of essential goods, affecting both the State and the insurgents. In factories such as Renault and Citroën, striking workers improvised "*commissariats*" to ration food and provide minimal logistical support, revealing their lack of preparation for the widespread nature of the protest. Contributions compiled by Bourdieu (2000) show that, although solidarity networks emerged between workers and students, they remained largely informal and unable to provide a structured logistical response to the occupiers' daily needs. The production of leaflets, crucial for political mobilization, faced severe shortcomings, with clandestine printing presses running out of paper and ink, and distribution across the country hindered by a lack of coordination. This disorganization stood in stark contrast to movements such as the civil rights movement in the United States, where well-established logistics helped sustain the duration of militant commitment, particularly regarding training, supplies, and securing activists (McAdam, 1990). In contrast, the May '68 movement in France was marked by continual improvisation, which limited the protest's scope and led to the rapid disintegration of libertarian utopia, ultimately allowing the Gaullist government to regain control.

FRAGILE LIBERTARIAN UTOPIA

Driven by a desire to reinvent society from the ground up, the May '68 movement embodied a libertarian utopia in the truest sense of the term—an imaginative collective vision directed toward a radical alternative to the established order. As Mannheim (2015 [1956]) argues, utopias are not mere daydreams but active social forces capable of temporarily disrupting dominant structures. In this regard, the May '68 movement was more than a political protest; it represented the emergence of a vision, a possible future that broke with institutional norms. However, as Levitas (2013) points out, any utopia that aims to persist

beyond its initial momentum must confront the material realities of existence. The May '68 movement, focused on liberating bodies, knowledge, and social hierarchies, overlooked the practical conditions necessary for its own continuation. The extended occupation of spaces, the paralysis of supply chains, and the lack of logistical coordination highlighted the tangible limits of this utopian vision. Confronted with basic needs—food, rest, healthcare—the ideal gradually lost its capacity to mobilize. The tension between the imaginative impulse and the organizational demands of sustaining the movement lies at the core of its fragility, offering key insights into the reasons behind the movement's rapid loss of momentum.

The Material Strain of Everyday Life

The early days of May '68 were characterized by collective euphoria and “revolutionary” energy that galvanized university students, particularly at the Sorbonne University, and factory strikers. However, in universities, improvised dormitories quickly became overcrowded and unsanitary, while food rationing soon emerged as a critical issue in the factories. As de Certeau (2011 [1980]) observes, the management of everyday material needs often remains a blind spot in utopias, despite its centrality to daily life. Motivated by ideals of freedom, self-sufficiency, and a desire to break the established order, the insurgents failed to anticipate the practical challenges of prolonged mobilization. The protest, far from being confined to slogans and ideological debates, could not ignore the necessity of providing food, shelter, and care for those involved in the revolt. Ultimately, the dream of self-management and direct democracy was overshadowed by the accumulation of mundane tasks, within a context of constant improvisation and an acute shortage of resources. The tension between idealism and pragmatism gradually transformed the movement's festive atmosphere, shifting it from shared enthusiasm to collective fatigue, which became increasingly difficult to overcome. As logistical support faltered, the insurgents came to realize that without basic infrastructure, even the most fervent protest risked collapsing under the weight of material realities.

The progressive paralysis of supply chains, a direct result of the general strike in factories and transport networks (see Table 2), exacerbated the situation, compelling a huge diversity of students and workers to develop rudimentary and often ineffective mutual aid systems. As Scott (2020 [1998]) observes in his seminal work, the absence of logistical planning transforms any attempt at political autonomy into an ongoing struggle for survival, a reality that became evident in the strongholds of the May '68 movement. At Sorbonne University, for instance, general meetings quickly shifted focus from strategic discussions on societal reform to more immediate concerns: the precarious management of food supplies, the chaotic organization of sleeping arrangements, and the improvised repair of sanitary facilities. This natural shift toward constant crisis management undermined the initial libertarian utopia, submerging the insurgents into a daily routine of mundane, exhausting tasks. The scarcity of resources further heightened internal tensions among leftist groups, some of which began to favor their own members in accessing scarce goods, thus introducing dynamics of exclusion that contradicted their proclaimed egalitarian principles and exposed the emergence of circumstantial solidarities. The wear and tear of everyday life highlighted a tragic paradox: a protest that, in its struggle for equality, inadvertently reproduced the very exclusionary practices it sought to eliminate.

Why Large-Scale Coordination Fails

The sociology of networks, notably articulated in Castells's (2010) seminal work, underscores that a social movement's ability to achieve critical mass depends on the robustness of its informational and logistical infrastructures. In May '68, this strategic dimension was largely absent. Each factory, university, or town managed its own survival based on locally available resources, without overarching coordination or meaningful resource-sharing mechanisms. This territorial fragmentation hindered the emergence of a cohesive national dynamic, while the logistics that might have unified the various struggles remained embryonic at best. Precarious and disorganized communication channels made it nearly impossible to synchronize initiatives across different protest sites. Successful movements rely on resilient logistical relays to sustain momentum and institutionalize mobilization. However, the May '68 movement remained trapped in a localized, fragmented logic, unable to transcend geographic dispersion and material isolation. This structural weakness significantly impaired the movement's capacity to withstand external pressures and

mount a durable challenge. As the days progressed, escalating disorganization intensified militant fatigue, eroded solidarity, and progressively undermined the libertarian utopia—marking the first visible cracks in a movement otherwise fueled by a powerful ideological and emotional impetus.

TABLE 2
PARALYZED SUPPLY CHAINS DURING MAY '68 IN FRANCE

Paralyzed supply chains	Logistical consequences
<i>Rail transport (SNCF)</i>	Severe delays and cancellations of trains, disrupting domestic and international travel
<i>Road transport</i>	Shortages of goods across the country, limited mobility of goods, delays in deliveries
<i>Air transport</i>	Flight cancellations, restricted movement of passengers and goods, especially international trade
<i>Fuel distribution</i>	Fuel shortages, especially in urban areas, affecting both personal and commercial transport
<i>Automobile industry (Renault, Citroën)</i>	Production halts, disruption in the procurement of auto parts, limited car availability
<i>Food supply chains</i>	Shortages in food supply, especially in urban areas, affecting grocery stores and markets
<i>Industrial supply chains</i>	Production stops in factories (electronics, textiles, metals), delays in materials and products
<i>Postal and telecommunications</i>	Delays in mail delivery, disruption in communication services (letters, telegrams, phone lines)
<i>Public services (energy, water, etc.)</i>	Interruptions in basic utilities (water, electricity), difficulty in maintaining essential services

Source: The author.

Attempts at articulation did nevertheless emerge, the most notable being the occasional alliances between students at Nanterre University and Renault workers at Boulogne-Billancourt. However, these efforts to weave broader solidarities remained marginal, episodic, and insufficiently structured to reverse the centrifugal dynamic of the protests. As Morin *et al.* (2008 [1968]) rightly observe, despite the ideological depth and social breadth of the uprising, the May '68 movement lacked the infrastructural capacity necessary to sustain its libertarian utopia beyond the initial three weeks. In the absence of organized supply systems, reliable communication channels, and the logistical agility to reallocate resources efficiently, the vulnerability of protest forces became increasingly evident. Christofferson (2004) highlights this logistical inadequacy as a key factor behind the disillusionment that followed among many left-wing intellectuals. The isolation of “revolutionary” centers not only enabled police repression but also accelerated internal exhaustion, as material fatigue gradually overtook political enthusiasm and collective resolve. Logistical failure was not merely a technical shortcoming; it revealed a deeper incapacity to conceptualize libertarian utopia as a concrete, operational process demanding the daily management of flows, needs, coordination, and mutual solidarity. The disconnect between libertarian utopia and pragmatic necessity played a decisive role in the movement’s swift disintegration after just one month of mobilization.

SUCCESSFUL PROTEST

For a mass protest movement to achieve its objectives, it must go beyond militant mobilization and satisfy specific functional requirements. Logistics thus become a strategic linchpin, ensuring the long-term

continuity of action in the face of attrition, repression, or fragmentation of forces. While shared ideals and collective indignation often fuel protest, its lasting impact also depends on the capacity to organize and sustain the resources required for its own survival: food supplies, shelter, communication systems, security, medical care, and infrastructural resilience. Far from being peripheral, this logistical architecture underpins the protest dynamic, enabling it to endure beyond initial momentum. Juris (2008) emphasizes in his analysis of alter globalist movements that the most effective social mobilizations are those that successfully construct agile and decentralized logistical networks capable of adapting to uncertainty, disruption, and rapidly shifting conditions. By contrast, the May '68 movement relied too heavily—and mistakenly—on spontaneity, overlooking the need for coordinated material planning. In short, even the most widespread uprisings are at risk of rapid dissolution without proactive logistical anticipation. Therefore, any serious protest strategy must include rigorous logistical foresight—the discreet, often invisible, but indispensable foundation of durable political dissent.

Historical Driver of Social Movements

Several political and social movements in the 20th century have demonstrated that rigorous material support is essential if protests are to endure and exert sustained influence. The Polish workers' movement *Solidarność* (1980s) is an emblematic example, insofar as its leaders successfully established robust logistical networks to support strikes, meet vital needs, and coordinate actions across the country (Goodwyn, 1991). Material autonomy was not merely a rhetorical ideal; it was the result of meticulous planning and decentralized organization, which enabled the movement to resist the sustained pressure and surveillance of communist authorities. Similarly, during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, protesters in Tunisia's Tahrir Square organized the supply of water, food, medical assistance, and protective equipment, thereby consolidating their presence in the face of violent repression and limited external support (Gerbaudo, 2012). The examples presented in Table 3 underscore that a movement's ability to persist over time depends not only on its militant energy or symbolic resonance, but also on its capacity to master the flows of people, goods, and information. In other words, ideological solidarity must go hand in hand with practical solidarity—grounded in the efficient, adaptive organization of the resources essential for collective survival. Maintaining pressure in protracted struggles thus requires robust logistical infrastructures capable of absorbing material constraints while empowering committed militants to act.

Logistics is not merely a companion to political and social movements—it actively shapes their influence and, at times, determines their trajectory. As Schwartz (2008) argues, managing resources, communication, and mobility is a critical lever for exercising power. Throughout history, the most impactful uprisings have been those that structured their logistical support with the same rigor as their visible fronts. During the Spanish Civil War, for instance, several self-managed zones in Catalonia endured precisely because of the careful organization of supply chains, illustrating that political autonomy fundamentally depends on the effective control of everyday logistics (Pagès i Blanch, 2013). Similarly, Cowen (2014), in his analysis of contemporary social movements, emphasizes that protest now increasingly relies on the ability to disrupt infrastructures—such as roads, digital platforms, and distribution systems—to achieve strategic goals. Logistics thus emerges not only as a backdrop to mobilization but as a contested space, a site of power, and a strategic resource. Far from being a neutral or secondary concern, it plays an active, structuring role in the formation and durability of protest movements. In this light, the May 68 movement appears not only as an instance of logistical shortfall but also as a defining moment in the longer history of how material, organizational, and logistical constraints shape the outcomes of collective struggles.

TABLE 3
MAJOR MASS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE (1980–2024)

Social movement	Period	Logistical dimension
Solidarity (Solidarność) <i>Poland</i>	1980s	Coordinated strikes across shipyards and factories, use of underground printing presses, secret meetings, and external support from the Catholic Church and Western unions
The Arab Spring <i>Tunisia, Egypt, etc.</i>	2010–2012	Mobilized through social media platforms, decentralized coordination, and crowd-sourced logistics; relied heavily on mobile phones and online activism
The Anti-Austerity Protests <i>Greece</i>	2010–2015	Occupation of public squares (e.g., Syntagma), self-managed food and medical services, and collective decision-making via general meetings
The Indignados Movement <i>Spain</i>	2011–2012	Mass occupation of city squares like Puerta del Sol, digital communication via social media and forums, collective kitchens, and first aid posts organized by volunteers
The Yellow Vests <i>France</i>	2018–2019	Use of roundabouts as logistical hubs, reliance on Facebook for planning, and decentralized protest locations to avoid suppression
The Climate Justice Protests <i>Germany</i>	2020s	Coordinated blockades, mobile protest camps, low-impact provisioning, and international synchronization

Source: The author.

Rethinking the Logistics of Dissent

Achieving sustainable mobilization ultimately requires moving beyond a purely utilitarian vision of logistics and recognizing it as a strategic instrument of political action. The logistics of dissident encompasses the material, organizational, and spatial arrangements that enable a movement to endure—against the pressures of time, repression, and internal exhaustion. It involves vital provisioning (water, food, healthcare), secure shelter, robust information networks, and physical protection systems. As Tufekci (2017) notes, one of the key vulnerabilities of contemporary uprisings is their infrastructural fragility: in the absence of careful planning, movements often lose momentum before they challenge or transform the status quo. In contrast, the “*zadists*” of Notre-Dame-des-Landes (Nantes), France, developed durable local cooperation networks, integrating agricultural supply chains, alternative healthcare practices, and decentralized energy systems. Graeber (2013) interprets this as a compelling example of material self-organization, where protest evolves into a form of sustainable communal life. In such contexts, logistics functions not only as operational support but as a medium for reimagining how to live, produce, and resist. The logistics of dissidence thus becomes both a practical framework and a political horizon—offering a tangible response to the enduring question: how do we hold out under pressure?

Recent history demonstrates the consequences of lacking logistical infrastructure. Despite its symbolic resonance, the May ‘68 movement faltered due to its failure to establish a sustainable material foundation. Immersed in the fervor of the moment, participants neglected the organization of supplies, medical care, and coordination across occupied sites. This logistical shortfall caused mobilization to lose momentum rapidly. As Jasper (2014) emphasizes, every social movement must build “infrastructures of contestation” to support activists beyond the initial surge of enthusiasm. Similarly, Della Porta (2013) shows that enduring mobilizations—from the Italian autonomist movements of the 1970s to the Arab Spring—were

grounded in strong logistical frameworks. In the case of May '68, the deliberate rejection of planning, celebrated as a rupture with the capitalist model, paradoxically undermined the movement's capacity to endure. The logistics of dissent, then, is not a mere technical afterthought but a prerequisite for sustained collective engagement. They demand strategic reflection on the circulation of essential resources—food, water, shelter, and communication—to transform transient uprisings into durable political forces. In short, subversion cannot simply be proclaimed; it must be materially constructed.

CONCLUSION

In many respects, May '68 embodied a libertarian utopia: a moment of rupture in which authority, hierarchy, and institutional norms were massively challenged in favor of self-organization, individual freedom, and horizontal cooperation. This aspiration aligns closely with the ideas developed by Goodman (2012 [1960]), who denounces the alienation of youth in a bureaucratic society incapable of offering meaning, purpose, or emotional resonance to everyday existence. The author argues for a radical transformation of social structures to foster personal fulfillment, individual autonomy, and collective experimentation. Similarly, Bookchin (2004 [1971]) explores the conditions necessary for a post-industrial society emancipated from scarcity—one grounded in direct democracy, social ecology, and democratic control over technological systems. In France, within occupied universities and the general meetings, these ideals found a striking and immediate resonance: the rejection of alienated labor, the valorization of gratuity, the communal sharing of knowledge, and the reinvention of alternative ways of living. Yet the libertarian utopia did not float in a vacuum; it was anchored in material realities and relied on underground logistical networks—often improvised—to ensure the provision of food, shelter, and medical care. This invisible infrastructure, essential to the persistence and effectiveness of the protest movement, is the central focus of this analysis.

The originality of the present contribution lies in its integration of logistics as a central analytical lens for understanding social movements and popular protests—a perspective explored in studies of the Yellow Vests movement (Le Bart, 2020), Occupy Wall Street (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014), and black bloc tactics (Paché, 2023). Using the emblematic case of the May '68 uprising, this article argues that the endurance of social movements characterized by strong cultural and social diversity critically depends on logistical planning to ensure the continuous provision of essential resources such as food, shelter, and medical care. Departing from conventional approaches that emphasize ideological discourse or militant engagement, this analysis foregrounds material flows as the core of protest strategy, contending that the sustainability of mobilization efforts hinges on effectively managing these flows over time. In this framework, logistics is not a peripheral or merely technical concern, but a foundational pillar of collective action—frequently overlooked or improvised amid the disarray of protest. By contrast, successful movements anticipate material needs and organize their fulfillment with strategic foresight, enabling them to withstand repression and exhaustion. The article's central contribution is thus to reconceptualize logistics not as a subordinate support function, but as a decisive condition for the viability and longevity of dissent.

By placing logistics at the center of the analysis of social movements, this article introduces a significant theoretical shift: treating the circulation of resources as an intrinsic and constitutive component of collective action, alongside ideological claims and identity dynamics. This perspective challenges the longstanding opposition between material infrastructure and symbolic superstructure, demonstrating that physical and informational flows are neither neutral nor secondary but critical elements that shape the temporalities, intensities, geographies, and modalities of engagement. The article lays the foundation for a materialist interpretation of mobilization, where logistical efficiency emerges as a central indicator of a movement's capacity to endure, scale, and effectively resist. By integrating insights from the sociology of social movements with perspectives from organizational management and logistics studies, the analysis advances existing explanatory models. It proposes a hybrid theoretical framework capable of linking intentionality with materiality. The central challenge, therefore, is to revise the analytical paradigms traditionally used to study social movements and popular protests by fully incorporating the dimensions of supply, storage,

transport, maintenance, distribution, and coordination as key empirical and conceptual objects—thereby establishing the groundwork for a comprehensive logistical theory of dissent.

Three principal research avenues emerge from this analytical perspective. First, a comparative study of the logistical strategies employed by social movements across different historical periods and geographic regions could yield valuable insights into replicable practices and operational lessons, thereby informing the design of future mobilizations. Such an approach could help identify effective logistical models—particularly those developed in autonomous protest spaces such as *zones à défendre* (zones to defend, or ZADs)—that may be adapted to contemporary contexts. Second, the evolution of digital and hybrid mobilizations—blending physical presence with virtual coordination—warrants close examination. The rise of digitally coordinated movements introduces new logistical challenges, particularly in data management, cybersecurity, and communication infrastructure, requiring systematic investigation to map the vulnerabilities and strengths of these emerging forms of protest. Third, studying State-led repressive strategies that seek to disrupt or neutralize protest logistics is critical for understanding counter-power sustainability within democratic systems. Analyzing how authorities exploit logistical vulnerabilities—for instance, by targeting supply chains or obstructing transport networks—can deepen our comprehension of the interplay between repression and resistance. Collectively, these three research directions offer a path toward a more comprehensive understanding of the role of logistics in social movements and contribute to the development of practical strategies for enhancing material autonomy in the pursuit of just and transformative causes.

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