

The fight against multiple professional land holdings: a new agrarian issue during France's "silent revolution" (1950-1970)

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on land ownership protests in France between 1960 and 1970. The idea of property access, often considered to be of little importance, returned unexpectedly in the 1960s, whilst agriculture underwent profound and rapid change known as "the silent revolution". The French countryside was marked by strong tensions during this period and a sharp increase in protests and calls for direct action. Amongst these, there were actions against multiple land holders triggered by the need to expand productive lands to make them viable. Using unedited judicial sources, this article depicts how agricultural modernization generated uncensored tensions and innovative forms of mobilization around the question of access to land, represented by strenuous collective and professional struggles led by the trade union movement, the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants d'Agricoles – FNSEA.

KEYWORDS

Land ownership, Protests, France, 1960-1970, Trade union movement

Between 1950 and 1980, French agriculture experienced a complete transformation. This "second revolution" turned an over-staffed and unproductive sector into a fully mechanized and export-driven farming industry. This dramatic change triggered significant social tensions in the countryside. Dubbed the "silent

revolution” by the young farm union leader Michel Debatisse,¹ this evolution was in many respects a “noisy “process, underpinned by a united and well-organized trade union movement which put pressure on the authorities in a very effective way.

One of the distinguishing features of this period was the resurgence in the farming community of the issue of control of the land. Access to land by farm workers, sharecroppers and farmers is a key facet of contemporary social and political history. It was crystallized as the “agrarian issue” and by the deployment of farming reforms enabling land redistribution. France followed an original path: in spite of the continued high number of agricultural employees, workers and servants, their struggles and protests remained only secondary.

Since 1907, and in the 1930s, French farmers mobilized almost exclusively to maintain price levels or to protect their production. After WWII and the food shortages due to the German occupation, food prices were once again the reason for new protests. The focus from 1953, under the Fourth Republic, was the linking of food prices to inflation. This period saw the introduction of a whole menu of modern protest methods, which continued into the first two decades of the Fifth Republic. They included street demonstrations as well as direct action, which took the form of roadblocks, physical attacks and the destruction of private and public properties.

While price parity remained a central demand, the reforms put in place at the start of the 5th Republic generated new concerns related to land access, control and ownership – all prerequisites to agricultural modernization. By putting the spotlight on the ways in which farmers conducted their protests, this article focuses on the rise of this new agrarian issue and how it fitted with the changing French ideological landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. It is based on original sources from the Ministry of Justice and from the media – both press and TV – at a time when the latter was becoming increasingly influential.

I – Fighting multiple occupations: an unintended consequence of De Gaulle’s reforms

1. The struggle for land in France: a long but disjointed journey

Social struggles in contemporary rural France had special characteristics. After the French revolution of 1789, protests were recurrent, and usually linked to wheat shortages and short-term crises. They took on a more overtly political hue as the social and political effects flowing from the revolution became felt.² The last mass uprising of peasants took place in December 1851: a clearly politically motivated protest, it attempted, in vain, to stop the coup d’état driven by the Prince President.³ Throughout this period, the issue of land ownership did arise, mostly in relation to the changing use

¹ DEBATISSE, Michel. *La révolution silencieuse. Le combat des paysans*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1963.

² BOURGUINAT, Nicolas. *Les grains du désordre*. Paris: EHESS, 2002.

³ MARGADANT, Ted. *French peasants in revolt. The insurrection of 1851*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

of communal assets, which became more restrictive or were withdrawn. The situation calmed down after the Second Republic – a calm that lasted for over a century.⁴

In spite of the existence of large farms, notably for wheat growing around Paris and in the North East, the French agricultural proletariat contributed only minimally to mass protest. Much more than land ownership or access, the issues of food price and market protection were the triggers for the most serious protests. In the wine-growing South, for example, the farm workers strikes of 1904-05 were vastly overshadowed by the major inter-class mobilisation of 1907. Similarly, in 1936-37, even in the favourable context of the Popular Front, the strikes by agricultural workers in the Paris region only had a minor impact.⁵

However, limited visibility did not equate with an absence of workers' demands with regards to land issues. These issues were of interest to small and medium landowners, farm managers and sharecroppers, who collectively accounted for a substantial minority of rural France's active population.⁶ Their objective was not land ownership. Rather, the workers' demands centred on revenue sharing and tenant's rights, which in the long term would challenge the landowners' rights. Farmers who did not own land entered into the collective struggle quite early, as in the example of the tenant farmers in the Landes and Adour region, who challenged the unfair breakdown of the revenue from the land.⁷ A few other clashes also took place before 1914 in the Allier and the Bourbonnais, and rose to fame through the works of peasant-writer Emile Guillaumin.⁸ These remained localized and isolated occasions, even during the mass uprisings related to the Great Depression of 1930s, when the entire farming community fought to gain a rise in the price of wheat.

However, with the Popular Front coming to power, draft legislation favourable to farmers was pushed through by the new ministerial team for agriculture, led by Renaud and Tanguy-Prigent. The draft was rejected by the Senate, but eventually passed into law in 1946, given the new political context of the Liberation. Among its many clauses, the law led to the foundation of arbitration commissions for rural leases, in order to manage cases between tenant farmers and landowners. Yet tensions continued to exist from time to time, especially in the South West.

Unrest resumed in 1953, starting in the wine-growing South, then spread to the South West before reaching the rest of the country. The National Federation of Farming Unions (Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Exploitants d'Agricoles - FNSEA) orchestrated the turmoil. The main issue at the heart of the conflict was wholesale farming

⁴ VIVIER, Nadine. *Propriété collective et identité communale. Les biens communaux en France (1750-1914)*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998.

⁵ HUBSCHER, Ronald and FARCY, Jean-Claude Farcy. Eds., *La moisson des autres. Les salariés agricoles aux XIXe - XXe siècles*, Actes du colloque international de Royaumont, 13-14 novembre 1992. Paris: Éditions Créaphis, 1996.

⁶ In both agricultural surveys of 1892 and 1929, landowners represented 75% of the total population, tenant farmers 20% and sharecroppers 5% - the latter however managed 40% of the farming land.

⁷ DUPUY, Francis. *Le pin de la discorde. Les rapports de métayage dans la Grande Lande*. Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1996.

⁸ GUILLAUMIN, Emile. *The Life of a Simple Man*. Boston: University Press of New England, 1982.

prices, falling behind industrial prices and squeezed by the rising costs of modernization, against the backdrop of an emerging common agricultural market. The activists' protests did lead to the creation of mechanisms of state intervention for farming and the linking of food prices to inflation in the autumn of 1957.

2. *From price demands to structural reform*

General de Gaulle's return to power and the creation of the Fifth Republic marked a tipping point in France's agricultural policy. In order to get public finances – greatly weakened by the Algerian conflict – back on their feet, the new regime immediately stopped the automatic link between foodstuff prices and inflation. This decision triggered a mass mobilization in the rural world not since seen since 1945. Led by the FNSEA, the wave of protest, in the form of demonstration-petitions staged in large cities was unprecedented. In Amiens in February 1960, protesters and police clashed, leaving one casualty on the farmers' side.

Faced with the peasant movement, Michel Debré's government was unyielding on the matter of prices, and put forward instead a much-needed transformation of the agricultural sector. The modernization of France's farms was underpinned by the acceleration of structural reforms and required a rise in the size of farms to increase both production and productivity, against the backdrop of the emerging European agricultural market.⁹ Over the medium term, the so-called "Green Law" would support the evolution of agriculture in a number of ways: a radical reform of farming schools, a reduction in the active farming population facilitated by the retirement of the oldest farmers and the strengthening of farm managers, even at the price of curtailing the freedom of landowners. The key innovation of the legislation was the creation of the Societies of Financial Management and Rural Establishments (*Sociétés d'Aménagement Fonciers et d'Etablissement Rural-SAFER*). The SAFER gained the power to purchase farming lands for sale in order to restructure or create viable farms, primarily destined for young farmers.¹⁰

Such interventionism was a real departure from the inefficient land reform laws passed since the start of the twentieth century. It was made possible by the congruence of goals between new trade unions – the National Centre of Young Agricultural Workers (*Centre National des Jeunes Agriculteurs-CNJA*) heralded a younger and more modern movement, but had to contend with the more conservative and reticent FNSEA – and the

⁹ LYNCH, Édouard. Le "moment Debré" et la genèse d'une nouvelle politique agraire. In : BERSTEIN, Serge; MILZA, Pierre ; SIRINELLI, Jean-François. Eds., *Michel Debré Premier ministre, 1959-1962*. Paris: PUF, 2005, pp. 335-363.

¹⁰ COULOMB, Pierre. La politique foncière agricole en France : une politique foncière "à part" ? La déstabilisation de la politique des structures. La transmission du patrimoine de l'exploitation agricole familiale en France. In : JOUVE, A. And BOUDERBALA, N. eds., *Politiques foncières et aménagement des structures agricoles dans les pays méditerranéens : à la mémoire de Pierre Coulomb*. Montpellier: CIHEAM. *Cahiers Options Méditerranéennes*. n.36, 1999, pp. 69-94.

government, whose strategy aimed to side step the price issue raised by farming professionals.¹¹

Such a compromise proved to be fragile. The first agricultural law passed in July 1960, but took a while to be enforced, even though its short-term impacts were minimal. This triggered a new wave of protest driven by young farmers, which led to a complementary law voted in August 1962. The alliance between professionals and ministers succeeded in founding the SAFER and in irritating the conservative majority backing the government. The reform also introduced the issue of land ownership and access, as well as the practice of holding multiple land holdings at the heart of the collective struggles.

Started in August 1962, what became the Gabin¹² affair revealed the depth of the struggle and the sophistication of the farmers, who favoured direct action and sought maximum media coverage. At 5 a.m., around a hundred farmers invaded, without violence, the property of the cinema star, Jean Gabin. Their aim was to get Gabin to give up two farms he had recently purchased to train his racehorses. The actor first agreed to the farmers' request. However, he later decided to start a legal action against the intruders, hence starting a long running judicial and media saga.

Not only was the choice of a highly popular figure significant, the intrusion took place precisely when the complementary legislation was going through parliament. The parliamentarians from the majority party were at the time attempting to tone down the government's draft, which they judged to be threatening to the rights of the landowners. They objected in particular to the powers vested in the SAFER and to the state's right to purchase land left in fallow.¹³ The initiative against Gabin was all the more powerful as it attacked a tangible case of multiple occupation and pitted a leisure pursuit – horseracing – against the labour of farmers.

¹¹ BRUNETEAU, Bernard. *Les paysans dans l'État : le gaullisme et le syndicalisme agricole sous la V^e République*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.

¹² Jean Gabin was a famous French cinema actor, (1904-1976).

¹³ *Carrefour*, Aug. 1, 1962. "The complementary agricultural legislation did not convince them. Will the peasants go for direct action?"



Still photograph from Gaumont News during the Gabin affair trial¹⁴ – November 1964

However cleverly orchestrated, the media exposure was only the tip of the iceberg. A deep and increasing exasperation, reflecting the difficulties in recovering land, could be observed across many French regions, particularly in the West of the country. In these regions where sharecropping was dominant, the real core of the issue was not so much land ownership as land use. The “Duval-Lemmonier” affair was a perfect demonstration of this. As with the Gabin case, farmers invaded the home of a landowner. Having just acquired a grazing pasture, he had not renewed the lease of the tenant who worked/exploited it. Contacted by telephone, the landowner refused to change his decision. The intruders caused major damage. This incident was but one among a string of mobilizations which shook the departments of Manche and Orne from the winter of 1961-1962 onwards. In this particular case, the tensions were crystallized by the practice of “*bannies*” which were the annual allocation of pastures. The uncertainty created by this annual cycle jeopardized the increase in farmed surfaces so necessary to the expansion or creation of farms.¹⁵ Faced with unfair access to land, agricultural workers protested and used force against auctions or put pressure on the landowners through acts of collective intimidation. These initiatives mixed modern media exposure, amplified by the press and television, and more traditional collective resistance methods that had been in use over a number of centuries.

It was not only the meandering political reforms and the mood of the professional farming bodies that underpinned the rise of the agrarian issue. The problem was fuelled

¹⁴ The board reads: “do not exploit land for leisure, others want it to work”.

¹⁵ Centre des Archives Contemporaines (CAC), 198000175 art 58, Affaire Duval-Lemmonier, rapport du Procureur Général de Caen, 29 août 1962.

by the growing tensions within the farming land market. Between 1955 and 1970, the number of farms dropped drastically, from 2.2 million to 1.5. The mix between landowners and land workers remained roughly the same in that time (52% of the land was farmed by its owners, 48% by tenant farmers). What changed was the proportion of mixed farms (comprising a combination of owned and rented land) – this grew from 25% in 1955 to reach 43.6% in 1970. It was this group of farmers who, as they looked to increase their land and keep the land rental and purchase market active, fed the protests. Nevertheless, land was not the only root cause of the collective struggle. The agricultural revolution in France also transformed production methods and market access.

3. The varied range of multiple land holdings

Further protests took place in the following months. They threw into sharp relief the acute issue of land access as well as the wide range of multiple land holding practices. The main cause of conflict arose from grazing pastures. These were much prized by non-farming landowners, such as butchers, against whom multiple actions took place. The following case took place in the Morbihan, in July 1962: “On 2 July, after a peasant demonstration which took place in the village of Bigan, protesters made their way to the village of Villeneuve in the commune of Saint-Allouestre where they entered a farm belonging Mr [M], Marcel, Esq., estate agent in Pontivy, who rents a pasture to Mr [N] Benjamin, Esq., butcher in the village of Moreac, who permanently keeps there a herd of cattle.”¹⁶

The aggression against multiple holdings also targeted industrial farms, especially in Brittany. Farm workers saw these as a disloyal and unacceptable competition, especially when they were the basis of double holdings:

On 20 July 1962, at about 2am, hundreds of farmers entered a poultry farm co-owned in Lanouée by Mrs [O], spouse of a veterinary doctor, and Mrs [P], which includes 8 chicken houses with 12,500 chickens to eat, 2,000 guinea-fowls and 4,500 egg-laying hens. Whilst some of the intruders restrained the farm managers and his family, others destroyed the hen houses, the water supply, the feeding trays and the water troughs. Over one tonne of special feed was spoiled with manure and approximately 2,000 chickens were destroyed. Before leaving, the participants wrote on the road: “To those who have more than one occupation. Final Warning”.¹⁷

While remaining centred on the West of France, the attacks against multiple occupations spread to other regions, and grew in scope too. Thus, farmers destroyed an apple plantation in Corrèze and left behind a flyer explaining their motivation:

¹⁶ CAC, 198000175 art 68, 62 – 1110, Manifestations paysannes Morbihan des 2, 12 et 20 juillet à Rennes et Vannes, rapport du Procureur général de Rennes au Garde des sceaux, 25 juillet 1972.

¹⁷ CAC, 198000175 art 68, 62 – 1110, Manifestations paysannes Morbihan des 2, 12 et 20 juillet à Rennes et Vannes, rapport du PG de Rennes au Garde des sceaux, 25 juillet 1972.

EACH TO THEIR OWN JOB

No more orchards in the hands of fruit transporters and exporters

No more fields or lands for cattle sellers

No more speculative forests for shopkeepers or professionals [...]

Should they remain unheard, the peasants of Corrèze will move on to less peaceful actions.¹⁸

Without vanishing entirely, the number of multiple holdings-related cases – at least those significant enough to generate major public disorder – dropped dramatically after 1964. This was a time when the SAFER were being set up and started to become effective. This reduction could also be explained by the reluctance of moderate and conservative union leaders to condone further challenges to landowners' rights.

II – Resurgence in the 1970s: a more political agenda?

1. The impact of May 1968

The new rise in land-related tensions, which resumed at the start of the 1970s, took place in a new economic and trade union context. Almost ten years had passed since the vote on agricultural legislation and new sources of discontent were appearing. Undoubtedly, the SAFER played a role in land redistribution, hence facilitating the creation and growth of farms. But their effect remained limited to about 50,000 to 75,000 hectares annually. Such a volume was seen, in the 1970s, as insufficient to impact a tense land market.¹⁹ In addition, even though the SAFER were co-managed by union representatives and by professional farmers, their interventions were not consistent from region to region and did not always prevent local tensions from flaring up.

In Angoulême, for example, young farmers interrupted a committee meeting to protest against one of its allocation decisions:

On 6 March 1972, the regional technical committee of the Poitou Charentes SAFER met in Niort to agree the allocation of land acquired by the SAFER in Abzac (Charente). The proposal put forward by the departmental technical committee of Charente had not been endorsed by all the professional bodies. During the meeting of the regional committee of the SAFER, members of the CNJA from the Departements of Vienne, Charente, Charente

¹⁸ CAC 198000175 art 71, 62 – 1205 – Destruction de récoltes (fruits et légumes) en Corrèze, 21 août 1962.

¹⁹ GERVAIS, Michel ; JOLLIVET, Marcel ; TAVERNIER, Yves. *Histoire de la France rurale. T. 4. Depuis 1914*. Paris: Seuil, 1992 [1977], p. 657.

Maritime, Deux-Sèvres, and Vendée stormed the SAFER office, occupied the telephone exchange and demanded an allocation of the land in line with their requirements. The regional committee, judging that it could not decide under threat, referred the matter to the consultative committee of Charente for a second opinion, to be agreed on 8 March. At the end of the demonstration in Niort, about a hundred farmers made their way to Abzac, where they occupied symbolically the property in question and ploughed furrows, after which they left without incident and without the need for the gendarmerie to intervene.²⁰

The union and ideological context also changed, driven by endogenous and exogenous factors. In the sector, new generations of young militants were much more critical of the modernizing agenda supported by the previous generation, as its effects on small farmers were perceived to be negative. In sharecropping and tenant farming regions of the South West, the Movement for the Defence of Family Farmers (MODEF), originally launched by communists in 1959, kept the protests active. Influenced as well by the Marxist left of Bernard Lambert and the Unified Socialist Party, young farmers were more left leaning than their forebears²¹ From the end of the 1960s, Marxist militants took control of an array of union bodies, such as the departmental branches of the young farmers. They spread a new ideology attacking the dominance of capitalism in rural France and mocking the so-called independence of food producers. At the same time, they resumed direct action in the field.²²

May 1968 did not have an immediate impact. Nevertheless, it contributed to the spread of new Marxist themes, refreshed the ideological framework of the struggle on the land and modified the tactics to include more direct actions.²³ Meanwhile, far-left organizations focused more on rural struggles, which had been traditionally discounted as not fitting the theoretical framework of working class struggles.

2. A new wave of land-related conflicts (1970-1978)

Collective action was on the rise from the start of the 1970s and reused the methods of the early 1960s, including pressurising landowners at lease renewal time to the detriment of incumbent tenants. The following report covered such an incident in 1971 in the Lot et Garonne:

I respectfully report the peaceful demonstration organized by young farmers on the occasion of the hearing at the arbitration tribunal of Sarlat, on Thursday 14 May, of a case of farming lease renewal and right to recover between a landlord, Mr X, merchant and landowner in Eyrynac and his

²⁰ CAC, 19860684 art 40, rapport du procureur général de Bordeaux au Garde des Sceaux, 30 mars 1972.

²¹ KERMALEGENN, Tudi ; PRIGENT, François ; RICHARD, Gilles ; SAINCLIVIER, Jacqueline. eds., *Le PSU vu d'en bas. Réseaux sociaux, mouvement politique, laboratoire d'idées (années 1950-années 1980)*. Rennes : PUR, 2010..

²² LAMBERT, Bernard. *Les paysans dans la lutte des classes*. Paris : Seuil, 1970.

²³ BRUNEAU, Ivan. Quand des paysans deviennent "soixante-huitards". In : PUDAL, Bernard ; GOBILLE, Boris ; MATONTI, Frédérique ; DAMAMME, Dominique. eds., *Mai-Juin 1968*. Paris, Editions de l'Atelier, 2008, pp. 344-356.

farmer, Mr [Y], president of the CETA²⁴ of Saint Genies. [...] The Dordogne branch of the FSEA de Dordogne and the Centre des jeunes agriculteurs [CNJA] have sent 25 of their members to the tribunal to mark their solidarity with the tenant. [...] Neither gathering nor demonstration has been organized. Four small boards were placed on the ground at the end of the court session: “Farmers have the right to live”. “Say no to cumulative jobs”. “Mr [X] owner ‘yes’, farmer ‘no’”. “If you are the Nansac family, we’ll be the croquants”.²⁵

This last slogan alluded to the novel by Eugène Le Roy, “Jacquou le Croquant”.²⁶ Adapted for television in September 1969, the series was a popular success and the CNJA demonstrations rode on this wave during the autumn of 1969.

Direct action resumed too, taking place at the homes of landowners accused of holding multiple jobs. From time to time, these initiatives were complemented by demonstrations and sit-ins in public spaces, as happened in Loire-Atlantique:

I respectfully report that on 17 September 1971, around 14hrs, following an appeal from the leaders of the Loire-Atlantique branch of the FDSEA, 300 farmers gathered in the village square of Lège to protest against the cumulative farming jobs held by Mr [Z] Michel, a butcher of Poiré sur Vie (Vendée). Their grievance was that he manages the lands of his father [Z] Marcel as well as 3 hectares leased by Mrs [T], a widow, to the aforementioned [Z] Marcel. After speeches by Mr [V], the sub-departmental head of FDSEA and by Mr [W], local head of FDSEA to explain the reasons for the demonstration, a convoy of 95 tractors, headed by Mr [Y] department head for FDSEA. This cortege paraded throughout Lège and then proceeded to the house of Mr [Z] Marcel who let a delegation in.

The negotiation having stalled or failed, a 1960s method was re-ignited and became much more systematic: field ploughing, sometimes enhanced by seed-planting:

The three FDSEA union leaders then decided to have a disputed strip of land ploughed. Hence, on their instructions, 95 peasants went with their tractors to a field of stubble of about 2 hectares, of which half had been prepared for seeding an artificial prairie. Once the barbed-wire fence was cut in six different places, the peasants entered the field and ploughed it entirely.²⁷

²⁴ Centre d’Etudes Techniques Agricoles (Centre for Technical Agricultural Studies).

²⁵ CAC, 19800367 art 24 - 70 – 16 – Manifestation à Sarlat le 14 mai 1970, Rapport du préfet de la Dordogne au ministre de l’Intérieur, 20 mai 1970.

²⁶ Published in 1899, it tells the story of a young peasant who led, under the Monarchy of July, a revolt against an evil nobleman.

²⁷ CAC, 19800444, art 70, 71 – 31 – Manifestation du CDJA le 1^{er} mai 71, affaire Ameteau Robert

Such an approach mirrored the increasing attacks against agricultural products. As the output of their labours lost its political and symbolic nature, farmers had no compunction in destroying it, as they did during the milk strike of 1972.²⁸

3. The increasing role of politics

Land struggles in the 1970s were different: they lasted longer and took on an ideological dimension. Unlike their often short-lived 1960s precursors, some cases went on for years, marked by deeper militant commitment and more pervasive actions. Their political dimension was deeper and was supported by connections to other unions or political parties of urban origin. The fight for the Larzac, which started in 1971, provided an exemplary backdrop. The central issue was not multiple holdings. However, land ownership was at the very heart of the conflict: the fight of the 103 peasants aimed to defend the land against the extension of the nearby military zone, and drew support from peasants of the Aveyron and militants from all over the country. The network of working peasants was critical in the nationalization of the protest.²⁹

The Ameteau affair mobilised the farmers of the Deux-Sèvres over many years and illustrated the new customs in the struggle for land. R. Ameteau was a butcher who exploited over 80 hectares of land, the Epinay farm. Since 1967, he had been convicted repeatedly for breaking the law against multiple holdings. Still, he refused to leave his farm. This refusal led to a series of incidents, particularly during the spring of 1971. In March, during a first demonstration, shots were fired by the butcher-farmer who was subsequently thrown in a pond. A few weeks later, on May 1, fields were ploughed, and the police intervened:

Around 10 o'clock, two groups of around 20 tractors pulling farming ploughs made their way to Noireterre via the road of Cerisay. The owners of 8 of these machines could be identified in spite of the vehicles' number plates being camouflaged. Thereafter, roughly 50 cars and a hundred pedestrians gathered about 2km from the Ameteau farm. The number of protesters kept on growing to reach around 400 at the start of the afternoon. At that point, three trees at the edge of the farmhouse were cut and a number of tractors ploughed 3 hectares of sown fields.³⁰

As well as evidencing the new forms of class struggle, these operations revealed too the underlying ideological and union tensions. The labour day demonstration of May 1 was supported by industrial workers' unions and militant student groups, as the CDJA of Deux-Sèvres failed to be endorsed by the FDSEA, worried about "leftist deviance". A flyer published on this occasion by the CDJA was crystal clear:

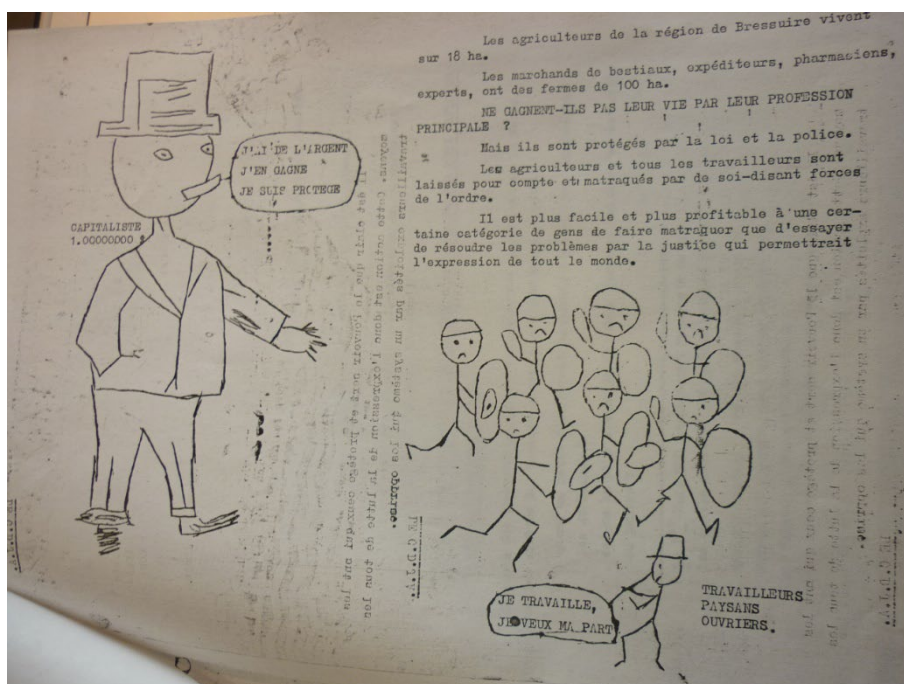
²⁸ LYNCH, Edouard. *Détruire pour exister : les grèves du lait en France (1964, 1972 et 2009)*. *Politix*. n. 103, 2013.

²⁹ TERRAL, Pierre Marie. *Larzac, de la lutte paysanne à l'altermondialisme*. Toulouse: Privat, 2011.

³⁰ CAC, 19800444, art 70, 71 – 31 – Manifestation du CDJA le 1^{er} mai 71, affaire Ameteau Robert.

On 4th March, with the support of the FDSEA, 400 people turned up at the Farm of Epinay. On 1st May, without the FDSEA support, 600 people with tractors. That day, the going got tougher. Three fields were ploughed in all directions and a few fences were pulled down. At the farmhouse, 300 riot police and a helicopter were stationed to protect Ameteau, an outlaw but who had the means to pay. They attacked the demonstrators savagely, injuring a few and taking one prisoner. The riot police handed over the prisoner to Ameteau's sons who hurt him some more...

By way of conclusion, the flyer read: "The authorities serve and protect those who can pay. This movement is therefore the expression of the struggle of all the workers being exploited by an oppressive system".³¹



Flyer published during the Ameteau affair, May 1971

The sudden burst of activities against multiple land holdings during the first ten years of the Fifth Republic accompanied a deep change in agrarian structures, itself a consequence of the integration of French agriculture into European and global commerce. The shockwave that followed the modernization of French agriculture surfaced underlying tensions, which had, until then, remained a secondary concern in French farmers' demands. At a time when strong demographic growth counter-balanced rural exodus, the need to quickly extend farm sizes started a period of novel conflicts. This was particularly true in regions where indirect farming was important and where the specialization of production, especially for cattle, was accelerating.

³¹ CAC, 19800444 art 70 - 71 - 31 - Manifestation du CDJA le 1^{er} mai 1971, affaire Ameteau Robert, tract CDJA, sd (mai 1971).

Choosing direct action against multiple holdings and land concentration was based on twin factors. First, a new generation of trade unions, started by the French Catholic Youth (JAC) and the CNJA in the early 1960s, emphasized structural reforms and, with their modernizing and entrepreneurial ideology, challenged the traditional view of landownership still upheld by the conservative elites. In addition, the refreshed struggle for land was based on more egalitarian principles, which had originated in nineteenth century moral economics and had been reinvigorated in the 1960s by influential Marxist theories.

From the viewpoint of the types of action chosen, these struggles included modern practices started in the 1960s – direct actions and the invasion of public space which shocked public opinion and the media. These were combined with more subtle local forms of collective pressure against the “master” or the “lord of the manor” which were reminiscent of traditional acts of intimidation, resistance and pressure.

Protests against the limited access to land gradually reduced during the 1970s. This was because concerns about pricing, by then regulated at the European level, returned as one of the key drivers of the agricultural opposition, as illustrated by the “cattle crisis” of the summer of 1974. Dozens of often very violent demonstrations took place in July that year. Nevertheless, the land issue could still come back to the fore. A particular battleground focused on the access to grazing pastures – this triggered new unrest, especially in the Doubs, during the acute drought of the summer of 1976.

Overall, the combination of the continued drop in the number of farms and the growing effect of the Common Agricultural Policy (PAC) on food production meant the land issue fell in importance. From the end of the 1970s, the market for rural land went into reverse: the volume of transactions went down and the price of land either stagnated or dropped.³²

From the 1990s, the reforms of the PAC failed to prevent over-production and led to the serious consideration of putting farm lands to fallow.³³ This was a strong signal, even if the forced stoppage would first target the least productive areas. All the same, it did not put a complete end to competition for land. Throughout the period, the break-even point for farms kept going up. The number of farmers was decreasing but they needed ever-larger surfaces to make a living.³⁴

³² SERVOLIN, Claude. Où va le marché foncier ? *La Semaine Vétérinaire*. n.372, Paris, 27 avril 1985.

³³ Fallow land covered 1.4 million hectares in 1950, fell to 230,000 in 1990, before climbing back to 1.2 million in 2000.

³⁴ The average size of a farm grew from 14 hectares to 19 between 1955 and 1979, then to 28 in 1988, and 55 in 2010.