

French strikes could teach U.S. a lesson

Enjolras is rolling over in his grave. When he led the revolution against French imperialism immortalized in "Les Misérables," he probably didn't foresee the current situation.

Or maybe he did.

French students once again have taken to the streets, this time over a measure called the C.P.E., the contract of first hire, introduced by the government in an effort to curb excessive unemployment in France. The C.P.E. in its initial form, which was intended for those younger than 26, allows employers to fire workers for any reason – except provable discrimination – within the first two years of their service.

To me, this sounds reasonable. Almost a quarter of the younger-than-25 crowd (22.3 percent of those 15 to 24 years old) in France is without work and looking for it, and it's because business owners are too scared to hire new hands. Once they take on somebody, there's no way to get rid of them even if they become lazy or incompetent or sexually harass their colleagues. It takes months and months of rigmarole to dismiss someone legitimately. In fact, France proudly employs an entire agency of government workers whose express purpose is to determine whether other people are doing their jobs.

Yet the power of the student protestors is nothing to sneeze at. And it took just as long to get rid of them as any indolent worker.

France's prime minister, Dominique de Villepin (for whom the C.P.E. was a pet project), certainly canceled his plans to run for the presidency, and as the protests and strikes dragged on, rumors of his impending resignation flew faster. Among others, young Muslim adults from the outskirts of Paris, notorious for the furious riots last



Jessie Gasch

November, added a violent dimension to the cries of unrest. One protestor in a coma is in a Paris hospital, and hundreds of demonstrators have spent days in jail as police have used tear gas and riot gear in their own defense. The photos that have graced the international pages of the New York Times and Le Monde look more like Baghdad than a developed Western European nation.

As the French students marched and waved signs like "Give us back the right to work!" we Americans are mystified. Either you do your job, or you don't have a job in the United States: Even if you do your job, you might end up with a pink slip, like my father after 22 years at the same company.

Even the rest of the European world thinks the French and their government are a little crazy. (Editorials in the London Observer, the Brussels Standard and the Madrid El País say as much.) I challenge you to pick a day on which no one in France is on strike. I tried to mail a letter today, but a handwritten sign on the post office door read, "On strike. Come back tomorrow." As for the C.P.E., the French workers have agreed to show their support of the students by striking – but only every Tuesday. The demonstrators have sponsored musical acts

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and temporary baked-goods stands here in Aix-en-Provence, and as the spring sun begins to shine, it's more like a street festival than a protest.

The Fac de Lettres, one department of the university in Aix, has been closed for more than five weeks. Final exams have been postponed until September.

No, above all, I don't think Enjolras' blockade was meant to prevent students from going to school. Maybe if they were in the classroom, someone would tell them that using a tool too often will wear it down.

With a still-drooping, less-than-25 percent approval rate, Villepin finally caved April 10, replacing the C.P.E. altogether with "measures to help disadvantaged young people find work," according to Xinhua.com.

Maybe we mystified Americans need to take a closer look at this "solidarité" thing. When's the last time our country went on strike (even just on Tuesdays) in support of our college students? With drooping support for higher education, let's work on that.

Jessie Gasch is a junior French and linguistics major studying abroad in France.

Columnist offers rules for a successful letter to the editor

While eating lunch in the SUB the other day, a young man approached me and asked, "Are you Joel Andersen?" Upon confirming my identity, he quickly replied, "I hate your articles, and I'm not the only one who thinks this."

I was a bit surprised at this response, and it took a phenomenal amount of self-control to stop myself from laughing. I told him to write a letter to the editor if he felt so strongly about the issue as I'm sure I've probably caused him many sleepless nights. He said that he might and then stormed away before I could ask him why I caused him so much personal angst.

He said he hated my articles in the plural form, so I decided it probably wasn't one of the very serious issues I wrote about that offended him, but rather my writing style and sense of humor. Regardless of the reason, it was the best response to my writing I've received since former president Jack Magruder wrote me an e-mail the other week, which he signed Captain Jack.

Because I'm curious what my biggest fan's criticism might be, I decided to dedicate this column to the issue of writing letters to the editor to encourage him to pick up the pen and paper and make use of his opposable thumbs.

I always read the letters to the editors first, and during the years, I've noticed some fairly common attributes. First and foremost, a good letter to the editor is epically long, at least 30,000 words. If you can't dedicate that many words to your issue, then it obviously isn't very dear to your heart. I know that the editorial board requests letters be kept to a maximum of 300 words, but that's to weed out the weak.

They say brevity is the soul of wit, but using the additive properties of algebra, I've



Joel Andersen

determined that lots of sequential brevity, taking the form of a book-long dissertation, equals a lot of wit. I'm Asian, so that means I'm a math authority of sorts as well as an expert in the deadly arts of karate, all Asian languages and coal mining.

In addition to being stupendously long, a good letter to the editor needs to reflect the personal writing style of the author even if this means that nobody else can understand a word of it. Take for example our local British resident and common Index contributor, Larry Iles. I'm sure he has many interesting things to say, but I have trouble reading his letters without having a massive brain aneurysm. Unlike most people who write in a register of English which can be generally understood and disseminated, Larry Iles has chosen to write in a variation of English that makes even the most hardened linguist step back in awe and wonder at the Gordian's Knot of clauses.

Upon writing a letter that is both insufferably long and unreadable, the next step is to not proofread it. While it might be tempting to correct your grammar and spelling errors, our head copy editor Amy and opinions editor Justin really love to fix those things for you. Nobody but the

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Index staff will have to know the depths of your ignorance concerning the difference between "its" possessive and "it's" used as a contraction or that your favorite dessert is a big pile of sand.

Some other quick tips for writing a good letter to the editor include making disparaging comments about the personal lives of other people, getting into a protracted letter-writing duel which dissolves into a competition to see who has the biggest pen and finally using your own blood to write the letter, as that will be sure to get the Index's as well as the local authority's attention.

In short, the Index will edit your letter so it looks like it isn't your first attempt at a polysyllabic vocabulary. However, be sure to complain to your family and friends about the way your letter was edited because it's really our fault that you ignore word limits and slept through WACT class.

Happy hunting, and good luck with those letters to the editor. I'm expecting at least one next week from my biggest fan.

Joel Andersen is a senior English and linguistics major from Blue Springs, Mo.

Immigration issue's many angles must be taken into consideration

Immigration has been in the news a lot recently, and as an Italian-American, I feel like I can add some perspective to the craziness that is going on right now in the streets of the United States and in the halls of Congress.

There are 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States (my uncle Tony Spavone is not one of them), and right now they are battling for citizenship, protesting in large numbers in cities across the country. There are so many voices in this debate, and it seems as if the issue gets easily confused.

Hearing things like, "We are all immigrants," and, "This is a melting pot of cultures," is not really the crux of helping 11 million people who entered the country illegally gain citizenship. I love immigrants – they bring over good foods and do jobs that I might not want to do, but for me the key word is "illegal."

To me, sneaking into the country and then wanting the right to vote is like a guy coming into my house without an invitation and expecting a say in what we have for dinner.

I do feel like immigrants right now are slightly self-righteous. They don't want to be treated like second-class citizens, and I understand this – no one wants to feel marginalized. But I would direct all Hispanics



Rachael Spavone

to the Irish. If it weren't for the Kennedys, they still wouldn't get any respect. You have to earn your spot in America, and this is what is so great about this country. As my friend Justin would say, "It is a hand up, not a hand out." We live in the greatest meritocracy in the world, and so if you want the American dream, do it the right way.

Talk to immigrants who waited years to bring their families over from other countries so they wouldn't have to hide in the shadows or worry about trying to get a driver's license. Some illegals have built their lives in this country, and their children have been born here, and they own businesses.

There are many levels to this as it is not just migrant workers and janitors who im-

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migrate to America. Sometimes visas run out on students who have been trained in subjects such as engineering and computer science, and we have to send them out of the country. This is the type of cockamamie brain drain that we can't afford.

It is important that we keep our borders secure. But let us all remember that there is not a documented case of terrorists sneaking in through Mexico. A wall on the border is not a good idea, nor a feasible one. I do think there should be a way for the illegal immigrants already here to begin a citizenship process, but it shouldn't be short, nor do I think it should be easy.

Rachael Spavone is a senior political science major from Springfield, Ill.

Around the Quad

This week's question:
“What level of interest do you have in the upcoming Student Senate elections? What issues are important to you?”



Amber Mayberry
freshman

“I guess I really don't pay attention to Student Senate. Maybe I should read up on that.”



Andy Moore
sophomore

“I probably won't vote. I don't really know the issues actually.”



Kate Randall
sophomore

“I guess I don't really care that much about Student Senate. I guess I don't really think there's been very much publicity about the issues, so I don't really know what they are.”



Robin Chamberlin
sophomore

“I feel that for the Student Senate elections, more campaigning should go on regarding certain issues. I feel like I don't know too much about the campaigning issues.”

Extremes merge on an important issue

Something a little rare has happened. Last week, a representative of each political extreme actually agreed on something. Two judges on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals were the only two dissents in a ruling that creates a troubling precedent in favor of violating privacy rights of those accused of crimes.

Both politically liberal Judge Stephen Reinhardt and politically conservative Judge Andrew Kleinfeld have decided against the majority of the court, which ruled last week in *U.S. v. Gourde* that the FBI has the authority to search a home computer of a person solely based on his or her membership in a pornographic Web site that contains both legal and illegal pornography.

According to Pamela A. MacLean in an article for *The National Law Journal*, Kleinfeld, appointee of former President George H.W. Bush, disagreed with the majority opinion because it concludes that anyone who subscribes to such a site must be in possession of some of the illegal material available on some portions of the site.

“This assumption stacks inference upon inference until the conclusion is too weak to support the invasion of privacy entailed by a search warrant,” Kleinfeld stated in his dissent.

Judge Reinhardt added in his dissent, “In this age of increasing government surveillance, lawful and unlawful, and of the retention of all our deeds and thoughts on computers long after we may believe they have been removed, it is important that courts not grow lax in their duty to protect our right to privacy and that they remain vigilant against efforts to weaken our Fourth Amendment protections.”

Both are very important points to stress. Defense lawyer Colin Fieman said he would seek to overturn this ruling in by appeal to the Supreme Court. We all certainly can wish him success, but it might be difficult to foresee how the Court will rule based on political affiliations.

Undoubtedly the current Court is politically slanted much to the right of center. But, if both an ardent liberal and an ardent conservative judge have agreed the ruling is incorrect, can the decision by the majority even be contextualized within the political spectrum? Probably not, but let's try.

To start out, we have to consider the primary issue in this case, which is the right to privacy against government intrusion. This right is fundamental to the core values of this country that it is, and always has been, a significant guarantee in the U.S. Constitution. This subsequently should lead to the rational conclusion that such an issue would



Chris Matthews

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transcend political lines. However, we all know our political system and some of its beliefs are anything but rational.

Although these two Ninth Circuit judges have sided on behalf of our rights and represent two conflicting political views, this is not the norm. When it comes to privacy, both political philosophies, as they are practiced, usually fall a little short.

Liberals stomp on privacy in favor of government regulation on private businesses, telling them how much to pay their employees, how much to pollute the environment and how to produce and market their products. Liberals also do not seem to have a problem invading the privacy of our pocketbooks to provide social programs for other Americans in need.

Conservatives push privacy aside in favor of the government regulating a woman's natural freedom of reproduction with bans on abortion and restrictions on contraceptives. Conservatives also have no problem using the government to indoctrinate the public on particular Christian beliefs with Biblical commandments and prayer in public schools and in various realms of the government, invading every American's right to be free from intrusion by government religion and right to keep religion a private matter.

Thankfully, two dissenters on the Ninth Circuit have shown that ideological differences can be set aside in favor of protecting a privilege we all hold in high esteem – privacy. When it comes to the most important of issues, maybe we all can reach an agreement.

Chris Matthews is a senior communication major from St. Joseph, Mo.