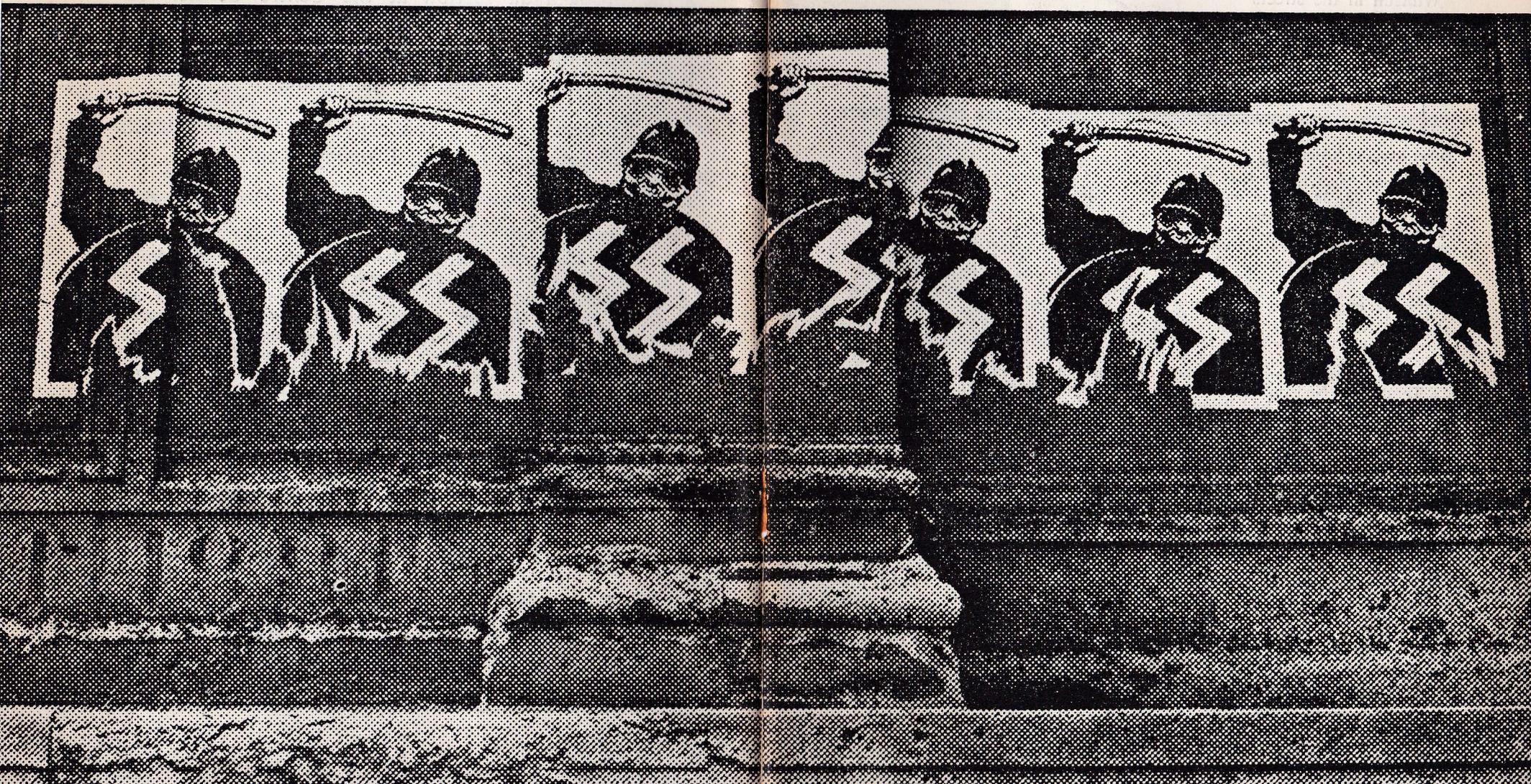


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# THE MAYDAYS IN FRANCE

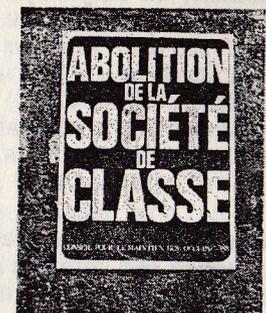
ANARCHY 89  
TWO SHILLINGS  
OR THIRTY CENTS



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July 1968

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# Reflections on the revolution in France

JOHN VANE

France. The revival of the great tradition after nearly a century—1789, 1830, 1848, 1871—from the storming of the Bastille to the fall of the Commune. A reminder that most of our political ideas (and the words they are expressed in) come from France. (It makes it easier to understand why old Kropotkin wanted to fight for France in 1914.) But how the tradition has become divided! The Tricolour, the Republic, the Marseillaise, the Resistance—all symbols of the establishment, of the extreme right. But that is nothing new. “Liberty equality, fraternity, when what the Republic really means is infantry, cavalry, artillery”—said Marx 120 years ago. What is new is that people are surprised when the French students occupy the universities and the French workers occupy the factories. The tradition must be part of the French people’s political education. We still remember our Hunger Marches, our General Strike, our Suffragettes, our Black Sunday, our Chartists; surely the French may be expected to remember the Resistance, the sit-in strikes of 1936, the mutinies

*Reflections in two senses—random thoughts about what has happened in France, because we don’t have enough information to make a proper judgement yet; and passive reactions to the light coming across the Channel, because a more active reaction isn’t possible for most of us. (Notes in a mirror.)*

*Revolution in two senses as well—an attempt to change a particular regime, which was unsuccessful; and an attempt to change a way of looking at regimes and at ways of changing regimes, which was successful. (Revolution in the revolution.)*

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of 1917, the syndicalist movement before the First World War, the Commune, the July Days, the Great Fear. We are hardly in close touch with French affairs, but recent issues of ANARCHY mentioned "the sort of activism which is endemic at the bourgeois Sorbonne" (Peter Redan Black in ANARCHY 84) and described the sit-in strike in Besancon (Proudhon's home town!) at the beginning of last year (Chris Marker in ANARCHY 76). After all, the Nanterre students have been struggling with the authorities for a year; where have all the experts been?



**Revolution.** A timely reminder that when you come down to it you have to go out into the streets and confront the forces of the state. That in the end only a tremendous and terrifying change in the way society is organised can bring about what we want. That this will not happen by itself, but that someone has to decide to make it happen. That we have to be premature (only premature action leads to mature action), that we have to make mistakes (people who don't make mistakes don't make anything), that we have to take risks (the blood of martyrs is still, alas, the seed of the faith), that we have to begin by looking ridiculous and end by looking futile. A reminder of William Morris, in *A Dream of John Ball*, pondering "how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name". A reminder of the danger of revolution, in being what Engels called "the most authoritarian thing imaginable", in provoking counter-revolution, in tending towards nihilism, in exposing one's weaknesses and giving away one's strengths, in raising false hopes and bringing despair.

Tragic to be so near and yet so far. The young people taking the streets, the intellectuals taking the universities, the workers taking the factories, the farmers on their tractors—if only the workers had run the factories and made cars to replace those destroyed in the fighting, if only the farmers had sent food into the towns for nothing and received tractors for nothing in return, if only the shops had opened and the public transport had run without any payment, what could the police or even the army have done? Who dare say it couldn't happen, after Russia in 1917 and Spain in 1936?



**Comités d'action.** The action committees which sprang up in Paris are the obvious descendants of the councils and committees (Soviets) which have always spontaneously appeared in popular risings of this kind. Here is the natural administrative unit of society which we want in place of the parliament, executive committee, representative council, or whatever, which takes decisions out of the hands of the people they affect. Here is the administration of things which must come instead of the government of people.



**"Groupuscules".** Odd how small political groups—such as the anarchists—are often hated and feared by the establishment, but are patronised and written off by many rebels. Surely both sides are wrong. They have no power, and yet in revolutionary conditions it is often their members who keep their heads and feed in the ideas which the movement lives on. Of course traditionalists and sectarians have little to contribute when things really begin happening, but conscious extremists still seem to have a part to play, and it is good to see them pulling together when things do happen.



**Marxism.** Interesting how it has managed to survive what the Communists and Social Democrats have done to it between them, to say nothing of the sociologists. The libertarian Marxists seem closer to Marx and Engels than the orthodox Communists, Trotskyists and Maoists on one side, and the various revisionists and reformists on the other. It is good that the anarchist strain in Marxism should be remembered. At the same time we should remember the Marxist strain in anarchism; the early anarchists always acknowledged Marx's immense contribution to socialist thought, and most of us still stand on his analysis of the class society. If we are glad to see some Marxists moving towards us, perhaps we could see how far we can move towards them; Marxism without the party or the state isn't very far away. In the London demonstration of solidarity with the French on May 26th, it was significant to see the International Socialism and Solidarity groups welcoming the anarchists in a common front against the Socialist Labour League when Healy and Banda tried to keep things under traditional Trotskyist control. The same kind of thing on a much larger scale seems to have been happening in France; the March 22nd Movement is described as an informal coalition of anarchists, situationists, Trotskyists and Maoists, united by common action. The new unformed, unnamed Fifth International may get back to the original aims of the First International after more than a century.



**Anarchists.** Will the part played by the anarchists at last convince people that anarchism is still a revolutionary force? We are still playing our private game of watching other groups picking up ideas which they think are new but which we know are old ones from the anarchist past. The importance of young middle-class intellectuals, especially university students and graduates—now attributed to Herbert Marcuse and the student leaders in Germany, France and Britain, but developed by Bakunin a century ago from his observation of the Italian republicans and the Russian populists, and later expressed by Kropotkin in *An Appeal to the Young* (1880). The importance of a conscious minority, though not an elite, a nucleus of agitators, though not of conspirators—now attributed to Guevara and Debray, but again developed by Bakunin at the end of his life and later one of the central principles of the anarchist communists and syndicalists.

Nearly every single proposal made by the new rebels appears in Kropotkin or Malatesta—but this is not important; what is important is that anarchists are among the new rebels. Ironic that the BBC programme on anarchism, which was broadcast in the Third Programme last January (and was printed in *ANARCHY* 85 last March), was called *Far from the Barricades*, despite the protests of some of the contributors who didn't feel very far; very near indeed, it seems. And yet how far is the English movement from being able to follow the French example? About as far as England is from being able to have such an example.

★

**Syndicalists.** It seems to be forgotten that the CGT, which has played such a disgraceful part, was not always a Communist organisation but was in fact the original syndicalist organisation, being formed in 1895 precisely to free the French trade union movement from part political control and to prepare for the social revolution by way of the general strike. The Federation des Bourses du Travail is well known to anarchists because of Fernand Pelloutier, its great secretary; the Confederation Generale du Travail should be equally well known because of Emile Pouget, the great editor of its paper, *La Voix du Peuple*—to say nothing of the 1906 Charter of Amiens (the classic statement of syndicalist principles) and the great wave of strikes sixty years ago, which should put the present events into proper perspective. Typical that young rebels in the industrial movement have to relearn old lessons again and again, just like those in the intellectual movement.

★

**Sorel.** Is he so completely forgotten? He is pretty well discredited as a serious intellectual figure (and of course he wasn't an anarchist or the theoretician of syndicalism), but he did have some good ideas, and it's odd that they haven't been mentioned. The general idea of the function of myths—"not descriptions of things but expressions of a determination to act"—and the particular idea of the myth of the general strike both seem relevant. Add the myth of the barricades, the myth of the working class, the myth of the soviet, and you have a fairly good picture of what has happened. How he would have enjoyed the attempt to burn down the Bourse!

★

**Communists.** Will the part played by the Communists at last convince people that Communism is not a revolutionary but a counter-revolutionary force? The French Communist Party, the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) which it controls, and the paper *L'Humanité* which it publishes, have together been one of the main factors preventing the success of the revolution, after the government, the army, and the police. Here is the culmination of Bolshevism after fifty years. (And the traditional Trotskyists were better only because they were weaker.) But the Communists have now survived so many exposures—Kronstadt, China, Spain, East Germany, Hungary,

Poland, and so on and so on—that they will probably get over this one too. Even so, this is a particularly clear case of their traditional function, fully documented and played out in the glare of publicity, and it should be rammed home. How do they live with themselves, though? Have they forgotten how Marx responded to the Paris Commune of 1871, and how the CGT used to lead rather than break strikes? They have changed in one way, though; they now betray revolutions before they happen, not after.

★

**Social Democrats.** Will the part played by the socialist parties at last convince people that social democracy, parliamentary socialism, is not a serious political force at all. Dreadful grey old men, staggering along trying to catch up with the band-wagon; only Mendes-France apparently preserving any integrity at all, ten years too late. How much longer do the French have to wait for complete consensus politics, Wilson squashing the unions, Brandt in the coalition? With Mollet, Mitterand (or is it Millerand?), and the rest, it shouldn't be long now. And yet social democracy is all too serious, because it presents the most likely "alternative" to naked capitalism on one side and Communism on the other, and because it is after all at least better than either of them.

★

**Students.** The important thing is to define their social position—their class position, in fact. Socialists of all kinds have stressed the importance of the deserters from the middle class, especially the intellectuals, and especially the young. Students are precisely young middle-class intellectuals (whatever their origin and whatever their intelligence), and they are at a particular stage in their lives when they are temporarily taken out of contact with the economic realities of their position, and at the same time brought into contact with the theoretical implications of it. Which group is more likely to desert the middle class, and which group is more able to do so—though only temporarily in most cases? Not that "the students" as a class will rebel—most students are "overwhelmingly and irredeemably bourgeois", as Liz Smith put it in *ANARCHY* 82, and their class function is to become the brain workers of the authoritarian, managerial society (whether officially capitalist or communist) which supports them for a few years and which they support for the rest of their lives. But the students who do rebel are among the most significant students and also among the most significant rebels, so they are doubly important. Interesting how the French students before the explosion combined the two usual preoccupations of student rebels—narrow university issues (restrictions on learning, on sex, on food, and so on) and wider political issues (Vietnam, race, capitalism, and so on)—but were able to get beyond the usual impasse only when they made a synthesis of them into what may be indifferently called narrow political or wider university issues (students' control of the university, workers' control of the factory, people's control of the streets). It is this synthesis,

which students are uniquely placed to make, which begins a revolution. And it should get socialists of all kinds away from thinking that the industrial struggle is the only one worth bothering about.

★

**Workers.** The important thing is to realise that the working class (industrial and agricultural alike) has not suddenly become revolutionary again. No class is revolutionary—this is one of the major fallacies of Marxism—but the importance of the working class is its objective economic and social position. Power is in the workers' hands—or rather, power is the workers' hands—but it is hardly ever used in a revolutionary way. If any ideology is peculiar to the working class, it is that which used to be called “economism”—the preoccupation with short-term economic gains (less work, more pay, better conditions, higher benefits and pensions, greater dignity) which makes sense in the workers' position. The three significant things about the French events are that the workers are not apathetic, contented, stupid, or any of the things which the right-wing academics and journalists think, but are still able and willing to strike for their rights; that the workers are immensely powerful on the single condition that they act together, in their own interests and on their own account; and that the workers may use revolutionary means but do not have revolutionary ends, except when their essentially reformist demands are resisted. In France the workers took the revolutionary step of combining a general strike with the occupation of the factories, they were so powerful that society almost fell into their hands overnight, but they let it go when their short-term gains were won. In the sense that a modern, advanced, industrialised society can appease the workers' demands without collapsing, successful revolution does seem to be impossible. But it is worth noticing how frightened everyone is of the possibility that the workers won't be satisfied. Thousands of column inches about the students' control of the universities, but only a few about workers' control of the factories; what actually happened, how were things run, how much production was carried on, how much distribution of raw materials and finished goods was there, *did it work?* And what about the millions of agricultural workers? They after all have the ultimate power of life or death in their hands.

★

**Leaders and prophets.** The media look for leaders. But those they find deny that they are “leaders”; so do their “followers”. A neat idea that they are simply “megaphones” for their comrades. Nice to see that they are not trusted to be anything more. This at least is something we are familiar with. And yet there is the interesting fact that prominent people in such movements do tend to be outsiders—Cohn-Bendit the German Jew, Dutschke from East Germany, Tariq Ali from Pakistan, Schoenman from the United States; after all, the anarchist movement in this country has over and over again been brought back to life by foreign refugees. This is surely a general sociological and anthropological phenomenon—the outsider brings a new voice, a

breath of fresh air. Thank goodness for aliens, agitators, immigrants.

The media also look for prophets. But who really listens to them? How many students had heard of Marcuse before the papers got on to him, and had ever seen a book by him? Most of the others don't even deal with our problems, but rather those of revolution in backward, agricultural, despotic countries. How many people have actually read the thoughts of Chairman Mao, wrenched from their context and belied by the cult of his personality? How many are interested in what Guevara said rather than what he did (and how many are sure what that was?)? And how many have read, let alone understood, Debray's articles in *New Left Review* and his book in Penguins? Or Fanon's? One of the most significant things about the present movement seems to be its distrust of prophets as of leaders. No sacred texts, no infallible pontiffs, no excommunications, no executions. Perhaps it's just as well that anarchist writings are so difficult to get hold of; people can come to anarchism through their own experience, by trial and error.

★

**Violence and non-violence.** Violence is necessary and non-violence is dead. Is this really the lesson of France, after India, South Africa, the United States, and Britain? It is clear that a physical confrontation between the rebels and the authorities is essential. But wasn't the initial contrast crucial? The violent attack by the CRS on the unarmed, unprepared students won more popular sympathy at the beginning than anything else could have done. Was the rebels' later use of violence useful? It seems unproductive if not actually counter-productive to throw cobbles or even petrol bombs at heavily armed and well protected policemen, to throw up barricades which are thrown down the same night, to fight without being able to win. Isn't the only excuse for violence that it works? But the strong will always win unless they break, and the police (to say nothing of the army behind them) have shown no signs of even bending. Is the violence of the French students (like that of their British and American comrades, of the South African and American negroes) really new? Surely the use of violence is only a return to the position before Gandhi and the Bomb, and we are in danger of forgetting the lesson we thought we had learnt, that violence breeds violence and the worst man wins. Do we then condemn violence? Of course not—there will be violence in every serious struggle, and violent resistance is better than no resistance—but we must question the current revival of interest in and approval of violent means which brings us closer to our enemies in more ways than one.

## Overtaken by events : a Paris journal

ROY PRIOR

**Wednesday-Thursday, May 15th-May 16th.** The Paris disturbances have been very poorly reported in the English press. First, the disturbance may have arisen out of complaints about the University system, but it has gone far beyond that now. It started with a row at Nanterre, a university outside Paris, when the university was closed for an indefinite period, and seven students were summoned to appear before a university board. The Sorbonne started to get active, in the big main courtyard; the *recteur* called in the police to clear out the students who had gathered to discuss matters. The police carted the students off and there were demonstrations against this action, and against the police. The Sorbonne was closed, and the universities proposed to strike on Monday, May 6th, demonstrations all day long, finishing with 20,000 marching. The police charged the march at St. Germain des Prés, and the barricades started to go up. The police use gas. It finishes up with police hunting students through the streets, beating them with truncheons. On Tuesday, another long march, about 40,000-50,000 people, students and workers. The red flags lead the march and the Internationale is sung at the Arc de Triomphe. More demonstrations on Wednesday, when the left wing parties, hostile hitherto, jump on the bandwagon. Thursday, the Sorbonne is to be reopened: the police are on the scene, and the students demand withdrawal of police, opening of all the colleges again, and the freeing of the arrested students. The Trotskyists hold a meeting where the whole affair begins to open out into a revolutionary movement. On Friday comes the explosion: thousands of students on a demonstration march are stopped by a dam of police: the students retire into the Latin Quarter, filling the Boulevard St. Michel up to the Luxembourg. They spread out and start erecting barricades to fight the police if they charge. At 2 in the morning, the police attack, using gas

*ROY PRIOR happened to be in Paris to do some literary research in the libraries there, when he was overtaken by the events of May.*

grenades, tear gas, truncheons . . . fighting goes on until 5.30, around about 60 barricades: many students are injured and seven are still missing, no one knows where. On Saturday, tension: the trade unions call for a general strike. The student militants occupy an annex of the University, and use the premises for discussions and debates. On Sunday, the unions discuss and prepare their demonstration. On Monday the strike takes place, and workers and students march together to demonstrate against the police and the government. On Tuesday the government gives in, and says that the student demands for association in the organisation of the University will be met: and the newspapers give the impression that this is what it is all about.

So it was, perhaps, in the first instance, but things have changed. The students have taken over the University completely. The lecture rooms are crowded with committees discussing the whole movement—for it is a movement: the whole structure of western society is being called into question. The groups of the left are of course very prominent in this questioning: Maoists, Trotskyists, Communists and Anarchists have plastered the Sorbonne with posters, declarations, exhortations; a flood of brochures, leaflets, pamphlets and broadsheets, as well as improvised newspapers, pours out. The great courtyard of the Sorbonne is crowded with people: students and workers, and some bourgeois, arguing, forming groups where people stand and discuss, dispute, bellow, disagree, create an atmosphere where one feels that they are awake! This goes on twenty-four hours a day, while people pass in and out of the building, the lecture halls witness continuous meetings and committees and in the courtyard the people go on arguing. Around the courtyard are the placards and proclamations, people sell the newspapers and hand out the sheets: trestle tables along the walls are occupied by various groups selling their literature—Trotskyists, Communists, Maoists: I haven't run across the Anarchists yet but I know they are there: their posters are edged in black. Walking out across the Place de la Sorbonne, you can see the same thing—groups, discussions, everywhere perfect strangers joining arguments, exchanging views, in an atmosphere of charged excitement which is impossible to understand there in London, and which is impossible for me to communicate. The level of discussion is remarkably high, on the whole, and if you can imagine the sort of energy the French put into an argument between two drivers whose cars have collided, transferred to an argument about the organisation of the University, the class struggle, the whole organisation of our society, the possibility of revolution: all this conducted by a free-floating crowd of literally thousands of people, in the Sorbonne, in the street, in the cafes—this all going on day and night—then you may get some idea of the Quartier Latin at the moment.

The moment being 2.15 in the morning (Thursday), and the place being a crowded (at this hour!) cafe in the Place de la Sorbonne. If I were rather younger and a great many illusions richer, I might be tempted to believe in the revolutionary atmosphere all around me. For

the atmosphere, if not the situation, is certainly one of revolution—it reminds me a little of accounts I have read of the society in Spain in the first days of the revolution, feeling of excitement, of tension, of all sorts of possibilities for the future, the illusion that these people might, just might, put a really big crack in the structure of the society which they are questioning so fiercely. In the spectrum of opinion you can recognise the possible chronological pattern of hypothetical revolution, from reformists whose ideas are limited to the granting of certain concessions within—well within—the format of the set-up as it is, through others who advocate a far greater degree of change in the status of the student, those who look for the fall of the present government without thinking much further (even those who would be satisfied with the resignation of a few ministers), those who want to see the students declare their solidarity with the workers, abandoning their present privileged position as those who are destined to be the bastions of capitalism, through to those who look to a total destruction of capitalist society and the establishment of a socialist society of one sort or another, and those who talk as if the revolution were scheduled for tomorrow, or the day after at the very latest. Here it all is, in words at least.

And what will come out of it? Not much perhaps: in fact, my guess would be, concessions in words from the government, soothing noises, a few reforms, a scapegoat or two—the Préfet of Paris, for instance, who did not want to send the police in to the Sorbonne in the first place—and then, nothing. For a while, the question is: is the feeling underlying this revolt so strong that it will break out again? I believe it is: this is absolutely not a question of mild student discontent within the framework of the education system, although it may appear that way, and may have started that way. It looks to me like a deep-rooted discontent and dislike of the whole structure of society together with a total distrust of the discredited leaders of the left. Those of the right are scarcely mentioned, even de Gaulle and Pompidou are not names one hears often, and when one does it is in tones of dismissal. There is no need to attack them in words: they are there, that's all. In fact, there is a very remarkable lack of names—plenty of initials of left wing parties, but no names. No "Leaders" in the old sense: nobody's leading.

4.10 a.m. Les Halles, always a sight worth seeing—Paris's belly, Zola called it, with its almost blocked streets, its furious activity, its enormous collections of fruit and vegetables, its stinking fish market with the enormous articulated lorries bringing in fish from Brittany and the south-west, cheese from Normandy, milk from all over the place. How very far from the atmosphere of the Sorbonne: the students may express solidarity with the workers, but how much solidarity do these workers feel for the students? A certain amount, perhaps, since one of the student grievances—not one that is well publicised however—is that so few children of the working class get to university.

9.20 a.m. This morning I have been with Sorbonne students effecting liaison with the medical students, who are not so enthusiastic or so

well organised. In fact, the Sorbonne people were on picket duty, persuading the medical students to keep up the strike and not enter into discussions with the teaching staff. It is remarkable to see: dispute, argument, persuasion, but never the faintest suggestion of a fist raised in anger. If in normal times Sorbonne students went to the Faculty of Medicine and dared to try to tell them what to do, they would be thrown out, but now the students must above all stay together, otherwise the movement is done for.

I am writing this in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. I look up to the roof, and there flying in the wind is a sight I have never seen before: a flag with no decoration, no addition, no national symbol: a plain red flag. And I can't stop myself from shedding tears.

8.45 p.m. Saturday, May 25th. I ought to have kept a detailed day-by-day account of what I have been doing and what has been happening, but I have been very busy. I have just filled in notes for the last week in my tiny diary, and this helps, but there are still lacunae. I slept most of Thursday, promising myself I would start work next day, and spent the evening at the Sorbonne talking to people and joining in the arguments in the courtyard. Several times I was asked by students what I, as a foreigner coming fresh to these events, thought of all that I saw; they seemed heartened by the fact that I was impressed. One girl said, "You see, we have been in it all the time, and sometimes we wonder if it isn't all just talk, talk, talk." I told her that one of the things that had impressed me most was the talk, the fact that people, all sorts of people, were arguing, and particularly that the arguments so often started from premises which, although I accepted them, I was startled to find the jumping off point of arguments. It was not a question of "Is there something wrong that can be put right?", "Should we change our society and if so in what way?". No: so many people seemed to accept that the society had to go, and the question was, what sort of a society was to take its place, and how could the change be brought about.

#### View from the Island

*On Saturday the Students' Union held its defiant demonstration. Boycotted once more by the communists, dismissed as pointless folly or crazy adventurism by many well-wishers, it nevertheless mustered a good 30,000 marchers. I join in near the head of the column, behind the proudly waving red and black flags. I've never marched under anarchist colours before, but what the hell. Students are laughing at the Humanité report of a speech by Waldeck-Rochet: "Our flags are not those of anarchy but the red flag of socialism and the tricolore, the flag of the nation." But this week the tricolore and the Marsellaise belong to de Gaulle; they've never been so clearly the symbols of conservatism.*

—Mervyn Jones, NEW STATESMAN, 7.6.68.

Certain key ideas recurred again and again; the two most important as far as I could see were "autogestion" and a rejection of the consumer society. The original student demands had included participation in the running of the universities, but now it was a question of workers' control of the factories as well as student control of the colleges. As for the consumer society, I was amazed at the vehemence both of the posters and slogans plastered all over the building, and of the people who spoke of it. Everywhere, it seemed, the idea of prosperity and progress seen in terms of consumer goods, money, affluence, television and the motor car was denounced and attacked. Sometimes the arguments against it were based on the concept of affluence as the weapon of a capitalist society; but quite as often, no such analysis was made, the speaker or writer seeming to express himself from the point of view not of left-wing politics but of deep personal awareness that money and material things do not bring happiness. Oh yes indeed, quite the most banal and anti-climatic of platitudes, isn't it? I too cringed when I first heard it that Thursday evening, but one of the remarkable aspects of the whole business was the resuscitation of the platitude. Solidarity between worker and student, unity of the left, comradeship between man and man, between man and woman, the spirit of the barricades, were concepts which had reality and truth. Many might sneer—few did, in fact; for me, certainly, the tired old ideas were reborn.

On Friday, I did a little work at the Bibliothèque Nationale, very unenthusiastically. On Saturday, however, I got very interested in a particular edition of a novel which seemed matter for an article, and worked madly all day. I was at the Sorbonne again that evening; that was the night I went on to the Odéon.

The Odéon Théâtre de France was taken over by students, including drama students, and was thrown open 24 hours a day as a free forum for discussion. It is a remarkable sight, the house packed with people, and three or four organisers in the centre aisle trying to direct the discussion. I say trying, because it is an appallingly difficult task. What happens roughly is that everyone is invited to put forward his views, and at any given moment, in a crowded theatre, a number of people would like to air their opinions, whether from delight in hearing their own voice, pleasure in showing off before a large audience, violent disagreement with the last speaker or the one three before him, disagreement with some other aspect such as the whole idea of a free forum unless it allows only the expression of the correct views, disagreement with the handling of the proceedings, desire to correct the last speaker's facts, desire to correct the last speaker's opinions, desire to alter the last speaker's attitude, desire to beat the last speaker's head in, wish to break up the proceedings, desire to help along the argument, or a wish to silence everyone who is making such a racket and spoiling the whole affair for everyone, and why do all these people yell so that you can't hear the speaker, so you bawl at the top of your voice "SILENCE".

And yet there is—to use one of the key words, even if it is over-worked, of this period—a dialogue. Workers do manage to stand up and say their piece, people do listen, people do start to try to see other

people's position, even learn from them. I stayed at the Odéon for four hours, till four in the morning.

Then I slept on Sunday till nearly midday, got up and went to the ménagerie at the Jardin des Plantes. I fed peanuts to the elephant, admired the alligators, crocodiles, turtles and tortoises, flamingoes, saw a just-born baby bison lying on the ground panting, saw several fine gorillas and some heavily moulted camels.

I continued to the Bois de Vincennes, and there, in search of some green and perhaps a goose or two, failing which, a mallard, I passed through quite the largest functioning fairground I ever saw. Well, it was marked green on the map. However, I got to the other end and found green—in fact, for Paris, an enormous expanse of green: you can walk quite a hundred yards before coming to a "Keep off the Grass" sign. Well, anyway, ninety yards. I walked this, and then came to a lake, with an island in the middle, and a causeway to the island, so that people can saunter across to the island and walk round on the paths admiring the elegant "Keep off the Grass" signs. I preferred to walk around the lake, eyeing the ten yards of water between the mainland grass and the island grass, each equally combed, brushed, barbered, groomed, titivated, beautified, rolled and beaten into a state of supine submission. However, there are ducks and some swans, who do not Keep off the Grass at all, but walk flatly on it, their large flocks of offspring quacking behind. There are a great number of ducklings, many of them swimming in blocks of twenty to thirty, each accompanied by several ducks.

I stopped near a rather short middle aged man who, at a spot where the grass had been swept away to allow the gravel path to go to the edge of the water, was complaining bitterly. It appears that the gentleman was feeding the ducks, and had thrown bread near one of two cygnets. When a duckling had gone after it, one of the swan parents had attacked him—the duckling. The gentleman did not like this, and was trying to hit the swan with a stone. He sent his little girl—about six—granddaughter I think—to get him stones, but she came back with a branch, with which he tried to reach the swan, with much explanation to the people around. I engaged a dialogue with him, explaining that the swan was only trying to protect its young; that it was perfectly natural; that the duckling was unhurt; that if he (the gentleman) continued to try to hurt the swan, I (the speaker) would push him (the gentleman) into the water. He yelled and shouted and insulted me, and then stopped and went on feeding the ducks. The swan came a little closer in search of food, and the gentleman reached out waving his branch and trying to hit the swan, and as I had promised him, I pushed him into the lake.

That evening I discovered the anarchists at the Sorbonne. They are much more organised in France, much more politically active, and they have played a large part in the whole struggle. Since then I have had some interesting discussions with them, and often drop in there. They hold forums similar to those at the Odéon, except that theirs are held to tell people about anarchist ideas, to answer questions, and to

allow debate on their theories. Unfortunately, these three functions in one meeting live very uneasily together. If you are going to tell people about your ideas, you stand up and address them. If you are answering questions about anarchism, someone asks a question, say, "What, comrade, is the place of bird-watching in the future libertarian society after the revolution has destroyed the state, comrade?" and you stand up and answer, saying unto him, "In a libertarian society, comrade, bird-watching will be one among many activities enjoyed by freedom-loving anarchists living in an international federation, and there will be no frontiers to hinder birds from migrating from time to time to other places for the pleasure of other anarchist bird-watchers in those other places, comrade." And if you are allowing debate on anarchist ideas, then the chairman should direct the argument without entering into it. The functions are incompatible, the consequences obvious and the forums less useful than they might be. However, when things do not get mixed up, they do in fact give the people who come a lot of useful information on anarchist ideas. Usually there is a brief summary of the idea of a federalist society and how it might be organised, as well as an attack on a parliamentary "democracy" in which the sole political activity of the mass, and its sole power, is to mark a cross on a piece of paper once every few years, and in France today, to say a blind unqualified yes or no to an elderly paternalist autocrat. Also, the forums may do a little to help dispel the aura of terror which in France still surrounds the words "anarchy" and "anarchist".

On Monday I went to the BN, but they were short-staffed because of the Métro strike and were not opening the Réserve, where my books were. I went to the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, but they were not issuing books for the same reason. So I went back to the Sorbonne. That afternoon I met an American law teacher and freelance journalist called Joe, who was trying to get some personal stories on the "nuit des barricades" of 10-11 mai; as he speaks no French, I went along with him for the evening, and heard a remarkable account by the daughter of a French ambassador, a first-year medical student, about seventeen, tiny, with a very young face; she told of what had happened and how she had got on, and I was moved and appalled at the barbarity of the events, but much more at their juxtaposition to this little girl. I was conscious not so much of her sex, but of her youth; at the total incongruity of this tender thing, and the shields, the yard-long weighted truncheons, the nerve-jumping crack of grenades and the blindness and tears of the gas, the noise and the dirt of the street, and the fear. The fear of the CRS.

On Tuesday, I went to the BN, but they were all on strike, so I could not do anything. (These two days I was trying to contact J.P. which I finally did, and arranged to call on Wednesday at 10 a.m.) I read a little on Tuesday afternoon, both work and current events. You must imagine too the enormous amount of newsprint being devoured in Paris by everyone in these tense days. The strike was spreading and spreading; by Tuesday the number of strikers was in the millions. On Tuesday evening I met a Finnish girl, journalist and

translator, and talked about translation and events in Paris until 2 a.m.

Wednesday morning I called on J.P., who seems to be quite a pleasant fellow. I worked there from 10 till 1, poking my nose in that time into all twenty-five box-files of papers, taking note of one or two interesting things. At a rate of seven minutes per box two inches thick, I obviously did nothing but skim through; but I found one particularly curious thing, a manuscript which appeared to be the last half of a novel, but which I did not recognise at all. It looked to me like the second half of a work of which the first had been published as an "unfinished" novel. I put it aside for further study.

That evening there was a big demonstration, called by the students to protest against the government's action in forbidding Cohn-Bendit's return to France. I took part, and it was indeed an amazing affair. A crowd of up to 10,000 people, chanting slogans, but most of all, singing the Internationale and chanting "Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands" (We are all German Jews). I was enormously moved—as I have been time after time in these last days. We marched towards the Assemblée Nationale, but were not allowed through to demonstrate in front (that evening they were debating the opposition's foredoomed censure motion). There I had my first sight of the CRS drawn up for action. I had seen them often enough in the days before, in coaches with the windows protected by thick mesh, hanging around the Pont des Arts. But here they were drawn up in line three or four deep right across each of several side roads off the Boulevard St. Germain, where we were, and across the boulevard itself. We were thousands, they were I suppose under a hundred in each side street, considerably more on the boulevard; but, but. They wear close-fitting, gleaming helmets, with a double thonged strap under the chin; jackboots; thick black uniforms with broad heavy belts; carry heavy truncheons. They are armed also with grenades discharging not only tear gas, but other gases of various sorts, some of them said to be banned by the Geneva Convention, some, certainly, of which the details are secret, so that the civilian doctors who treated victims after the first night of the barricades had themselves no accurate information to guide them in treatment. The CRS look awfully like the SS men of the war films. Certainly they would have made excellent SS men. They are, whether by nature or by training, fitted to be concentration camp guards. If called on to support my assertion that man is a stain on nature, the catastrophe of this planet, whose destruction would be a blessing of unimaginable magnitude; if challenged by some humanist to support this contention not by history, but

#### View from the East

*France is the first Western country to demonstrate that the social mechanism created two centuries ago does not correspond to the needs any more. The revolutionary action that has served notice that the idea of a workers' self-managed society is knocking on all doors of the rich industrial countries of the West.*

—BORBA (Belgrade), 28.5.68.

by living specimens, and if I couldn't for the moment find any concentration camp guards or Ku Klux Klanners (I have mentioned only two, and those chosen only from the ranks of those who persecute their own species)—why, then a CRS man would refute my hypothetical humanist quite as adequately as Johnson's stone refuted Berkeley. (I am quite aware of the implications of the comparison.)

But the CRS have made their first appearance, have shown themselves sinister, bulky, black, black, medium long shot, a brooding presence which we know we shall see more of; so, we shall leave them. They will be heard from. To be continued in our next.

On Thursday morning I went again to J.P.'s flat, and confirmed that the ms. was indeed part of the "unfinished" novel. When I told J.P. this he was incredulous, and we decided I should look through the documents for the ms. of the published section; it was missing, and I could not find it. The new ms. is about 30,000 words long, and I estimated that with the already published section we had at least 80 per cent of the novel. I left a note for J.P.—I was now very excited about this find.

(From a literary point of view we are doing well; we have two good plots going, one social and political, one academic and personal. Will the sinister CRS destroy the valiant anarchist forum by asking them questions they can't answer? Is our hero's find really the long-lost finale of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony? Will the black uniforms tear up the black flag of the anarchists and steal the precious manuscript? Will the goodies beat the baddies in the end? Read tomorrow's breathtaking thrill-a-minute edition of *Le Monde*.)

Coming back from J.P.'s flat, I had something to eat (I had not stopped all day) and then walked through the Place St. Michel on the way to the Sorbonne. It was about six o'clock, and the usual strollers were around. There was no disorder: yet a squad of CRS had just formed up at the end of the Pont St. Michel, across the whole width of the road, blocking the bridge, carrying their large black shields, ready for action. There was not the slightest need for this: no demonstration had been called for that evening, and none was taking place. If the authorities felt the CRS were necessary to keep order (which seems unlikely, since the effect of their appearance in this way served exactly the opposite purpose), they could have stayed in their coaches, parked nearby, as they had done before, ready to intervene if needed.

I went to the Sorbonne and had a talk with some people I had met, two couples, one an elderly railwayman and his wife, all anarchists. I don't know what time it was when I left them, but we had heard that there was already trouble at the Place St. Michel, and I headed back there.

That was the flashpoint of Thursday night's riots. The police barrier had attracted a large crowd, many of them students, and insults had been hurled at the CRS. It is fairly certain that many of those who hurled the insults were "provocateurs", intending to start trouble; it is less easy to say whether they were extremists from the left wing or the right, or even, improbable though it sounds, working for the government,

to give the public the impression that the students were in the wrong for starting it all. Anyway, the inevitable finally happened, stones and rubbish were thrown at the CRS, back came gas grenades, and the Place St. Michel and the Place St. André des Arts became a battlefield. The "service d'ordre" of the students tried in every way they could to stop it, but it was useless, partly because of the exasperation, partly because of the feeling of solidarity. The police advanced, the grenades and the stones flew, and soon the pavé was being dug up, the thick pierced iron plates that surround the base of the trees pulled up, and barricades went up on the Boulevard St. Michel.

The CRS had four enormous lorries side by side across the whole width of the Boulevard, advancing slowly uphill. Night had fallen, and the tear gas was so thick that it was difficult to see even if your eyes were not streaming tears. Through the haze came flashes—sometimes the lights of news photographers, sometimes, I think, some form of grenade striking. The CRS don't throw the grenades, they have mechanical throwers which send them a long distance and with considerable velocity, which in itself constitutes a considerable hazard when the grenades are thrown haphazard into a crowd. I can testify to this, as I involuntarily stopped a gas grenade with my left leg, getting a large bruise and a severe limp.

I was very frightened. I do not think I am a coward. I think that given a rifle and preferably a little training, I could fight. If they are over there with rifles and we are over here with rifles, I do not think I would run. But to stand your ground with no weapon, no protection—God, how delicate and fragile this flesh stuff is when there is a bang, and you find you are running—to ignore the tear gas—which is bad, there is no doubt: you can stand it quite a time, at least I can, but comes a moment when you are blinded, when your eyes burn uncontrollably and you are in the middle of the Boulevard St. Michel and there are two enormous bangs, you can't open your eyes and you are running across this naked flat plain stretching away to the kerb, and blundering into people as blind as you, your eyes burning, until you stagger into a shop front and put something hard between you and the flying grenades, and then stumble away along the houses trying to keep your eyes shut with the terror of the newly blind forcing them open, trying to see to run away from this hell. And if you run far enough, out of the worst of the gas, and your eyes stop burning, you look back and see that you have escaped from hell, the hell of the medieval painters. All around, blackness, and in the centre, illuminated by the tall licking flames from the barricades, hazy and flickering against the fires, through the steam-cloud of gas you see dancing figures, male and female, yelling and jumping, bending down to pick up something to throw it through the flames into the cloud and darkness beyond. Around them, crashes and bangs, and from a cylinder on the ground the smoke rushes as if an imprisoned genie had been let loose: you expect him to form in the upper darkness and loom above the figures, who duck and run, and then go back to face that huge darkness beyond. And you know what sort of courage that is, and you know you haven't got it.

On Friday morning I dragged myself out of bed after about four hours sleep and went to my usual café for breakfast. The Place St. Michel was a wreck, and even at nine in the morning there was tear gas in the air, stinging the eyes and nostrils. I was limping a little, and conscious that any policeman could easily deduce why. It had been worse the previous night. I had finally taken refuge in the Sorbonne as I found difficulty in walking, and as my way home led me through the CRS whichever way I went. Inside the Sorbonne the atmosphere was that of a siege, and serious discussion took place as to how the place could be defended. I thought the place indefensible against a gas attack, which would be deadly in the enclosed spaces even if only tear gas were used; but it was clear that if an attack came, the Sorbonne would be defended room by room, floor by floor, stair by stair.

It was not attacked. I tried later to leave, and found that nobody was allowed to go out. The reason I was given by the students' service d'ordre was that the CRS outside were clubbing down anyone seen leaving. When I was allowed to go, at about two a.m., I was told that I did so at my own risk. I soon discovered what was meant. There were four CRS men at the corner, and as I came down the steps and across the square on the opposite side of the road to them, they shouted insults at me with the obvious hope that I might answer back. I promptly decided that I could not understand a word of French, and went on. I felt relieved that I had developed the habit of always carrying my passport, arguing that for a foreigner the worst that could happen was a severe beating-up and deportation. I ran less danger than most, but I was terrified. To avoid them as much as possible I took a most roundabout route to my hotel off the Place St. Michel.

J.P. and I were anxious to find the missing manuscript and work on this mystery, but because of the strikes we were badly hampered. One man who might well know something of what had happened to the ms. after its publication lived in Tours, and we did not have his telephone number. Finally we decided I should hitch-hike to Tours that day, since otherwise I might miss him if he were out over the weekend, and we did not want to wait till the Monday. There I should give my letter of introduction to B. and find out what I could.

I got there at about five-thirty, and B. welcomed me most warmly, inviting me to dinner at his home. With him and his family I watched de Gaulle's television speech, which must surely be worth a prize as the anti-climax of the year. We spent a happy evening talking shop: B. was excited about the discovery but could tell me nothing about the missing ms.

At about eleven he drove me back into Tours, and I went into a café to sort out my notes and drink a final beer. Hearing a transistor radio going I went to listen: riots in Paris and most bitter fighting!

It was as if one of those grenades that were flying one hundred and fifty miles away had hit me, not in the leg, but in the head. After de Gaulle's speech, I had totally forgotten Paris, buried in talk about work; now I realized that with a shock that further rioting had been inevitable. I tried to telephone to London, which was impossible, and

then tried H. in Paris, she was not in. Useless. In between attempts to telephone, I walked up and down by the fountains. Anguish at the thought that in Paris the CRS were out again at the massacre, fear for my comrades, unhappiness at being stuck here, in the provinces, powerless, horror that the people I knew at the Sorbonne might attribute my absence to cowardice. I found that I was whimpering.

When I got back to Paris on Saturday afternoon, the devastation in the Latin Quarter was remarkable; according to statistics published on Monday, in Paris a total of nearly thirteen thousand square feet of pavé had been torn up in great chunks, and as much again in scattered patches, and seventy-two trees cut down, apart from the lamp-posts, traffic lights and iron benches torn up. Most amazing to me, a stout metal newspaper kiosk at the corner of the Place de la Sorbonne had been torn up—how, I still don't know; and *Le Monde* indicated that another four of these heavily built structures had been destroyed.

I was depressed. First I had missed the night of the 10th-11th May, and now this. The trade union leaders were negotiating direct with the Government on a programme of claims—the weary old claims that were necessary in themselves, but so irrelevant at this point. Shorter hours, higher minimum wages, earlier retirement for certain classes of worker, better social security—for the French workman, whose conditions had deteriorated so much, and particularly for the lowest paid French worker, these things were vital. Trying to live myself on thirty-five francs a day in Paris, I failed to see how any man could possibly stay alive on the minimum wage of under 400 francs per month for a forty-hour week. But it was clear that the trade union bureaucracy was playing the game with the régime, and wanted none of a revolution. Their wish was as always to share the power with the government, and keep their control over the millions they were supposed to be serving. They would negotiate a bit extra for their supporters and order them back to work like good little sheep, and their names would go down in history. And the workers would let themselves be fooled again. They

#### View from the Island

*Nothing could be more foolish than for us and the Americans to smirk to see the French President in trouble with his syndicalist students and workers.*

*These present discontents run vastly more widely. We are not all Socialists now. We are all syndicalists now, in a new sense. We want to have a real say in our own affairs. It is a crisis, not just of affluence, but of democracy—and of the so-called people's democracies, too.*

*It is in their responses to all this that all the rulers are now about to be tested. Not just President de Gaulle. Not just Mr. Wilson. Not just the abdicating President Johnson and the contestants for his crown. Not just the creaking régimes of Eastern Europe. All of them.*

—Donald Tyerman, EVENING STANDARD, 21.5.68.

had been woken up by the students, and without any instructions from the top, they had started a strike which their leaders had not wanted. They had shaken the French régime to its foundations, and shown just how powerful they were. Now they would go back to their torpid existence for a few francs extra a week, without even turning out the government. I had a cold, a headache, and no hope for the strike.

That night I had the dream I have from time to time, after which I always wake uneasy and disorientated. It is so vivid, and I so much want to stay in it, that when I wake, it is as if I came from reality into a distortion and caricature of the real. The unreality of that day could be put down to this, and perhaps to the awful solitude of a Paris Sunday. That day the usual Sunday afternoon outing of the Parisian bourgeois family took the shape of a walk around the principal battle fronts to gape at the debris, heads shaking at the devastation. The Latin Quarter was more crowded that afternoon than I have ever seen it. From the beginning of the affair, there had been a certain amount of tourist attraction quality about the Sorbonne and what was going on there, and no doubt a great many people came along to see the wild men, as they would have gone to see the gorillas at the zoo. Moreover, the student revolution in Paris, at least, was the biggest and most exciting "happening" one could imagine, and I had reflected that in fact this heightened vividness with which we lived was surely one of the things which had to be kept, or at least remembered. But on this afternoon, it was no longer a question of people participating to some degree in what was going on. This was spectator passiveness again. You sit in front of the one-eyed monster and ooh, ah, look at that, ooh road accident, ah Vietnam, bang CRS, and you get the extra kick of seeing places you know as a background for the bloodletting. So you take your Sunday afternoon stroll down there to see, and you take your camera along. Look daddy, that's where that man got bashed. Stand there in front of the barricade and let me take a photo of you—that's it, you stand on top of it and hold a stone in your hand. Click. Souvenir of the barricades. In the Rue des Ecoles there were two cars together which had been twisted wildly out of shape; it was difficult to see how such a peculiar malformation had been achieved. These were the favourite spots for photographers, but for every one who snapped the wrecks there were five who snapped their wife or husband or girl friend or entire family standing on or in front of them. I am told that during the Tet offensive in Saigon, people were putting up platforms and selling seats for places from which you got a good view of the fighting. I find no difficulty in believing it.

That evening I was cheered by meeting an American called D. He is a remarkable talker, who handles the English language as one rarely hears it handled, in a style which recalled slightly the prose of Thomas Pynchon. His syntax is more elaborate than is the case in usual speech, but there is no sense of pedantry, merely that of a man manipulating language to express coherently and poetically a complex structure of ideas and an involved narrative. The final result is real poetic prose—

not purple patch prose, but true evocative language which brings to life the concepts it expresses. As to the ideas, the narrative, the concepts themselves, they were the product of a rampant paranoia, the wild magnificent impossibilities of a mind concerned with a world where the computers are all interlinked and a small dedicated band of men are striving to avert the catastrophe whose signs are the student revolts, the Vietnam conference, the Democratic primaries and the taking over of a mental hospital by British intelligence, who use ECT to brainwash people who have learned too much about the conspiracy. That man would be certified without hesitation by any competent psychiatrist, locked away and treated.

On Monday the details of the agreement reached between government and unions were published; and the workers who were to ratify the agreement refused to do so. I was amazed and cheered. On Tuesday the search for the ms. continued, and I nursed my cold as I waited to see how de Gaulle would react to this defiance. We all waited. In the Salle des Anars at the Sorbonne, I looked at the books. The room had been—is—a small library, in which are stored mainly theses which have been written on quite the most remarkable variety of subjects. There was a curious discontinuity between all this buried learning and the living ideas that were the present, less tangible occupants of the building. Yet I found a link, a thesis which listed the contents of the "cahiers" or lists of claims, requests, complaints and protests drawn up in the Paris area, for the meeting of the États Généraux in 1789.

On Wednesday, as it began to seem more and more likely that an interim government would be formed and general elections called, J.P. and I went to see another man who might give us information, but again without success. But on Thursday morning we discovered that the ms. was at the publisher's, where it had been ever since publication; the strike, of course, was the reason why we had not been able to establish this in the first place. I arranged to work on the new ms. when it had been copied, at some more propitious time, and since I could do little more now, I decided to pack my bags and try to get a flight back to London. Skyways told me that if I wanted to come to their terminal, I could take a chance on getting a vacancy, and I did this, and waited in the lounge for the chance to get away. De Gaulle, who had disappeared the previous day to think over the decision he had to take, and thus given rise to great speculation, mainly on the lines that he was going to resign, was to speak on the radio at four-thirty. There were over a dozen of us around the radio when he spoke, to say that he had decided to stand firm, to keep his Prime Minister, that he would keep the country from the threatened dictatorship (gasp of astonishment from the listeners) and the international Communist conspiracy. The autocrat was going to hold out till the end, and it was impossible at that moment to give even the wildest guess as to what that end might be.

# I am a megaphone

**DANIEL COHN-BENDIT**

St. Nazaire, May 18th

IF YOU SAY the students are sons of bourgeois you are right. But a minority of them have made a complete break with their class. They are ready to join up with the workers. Where? In the street, where we can argue and can act. People talk about civil war. But on one side there are the workers, the peasants, the students; on the other, the bourgeois. The bourgeois will not fight in the streets. And their police are tied down in Paris. There are not enough of them to go round. The first phase of the advanced struggle we are leading must be the occupation of the factories. Then the setting up of revolutionary councils. We must find new forms of management. We must be masters of the means of production. Equality of wages—that is very important. Wages must be equal in an egalitarian society.

It is not a question of attacking the trade union movement, but of creating the conditions for a workers' democracy, where each, whatever his slogans or his banners, can have his say. I attack the leaders of the union organisations, I do not attack the ordinary union member. Unity of the labour movement will be achieved by the young. Shop by shop the young unionists must unite. Unity won't come from the top.

Frankfurt, May 23rd

Q: How do you describe your political position?

A: Basically I am an anarchist . . . a Marxist-anarchist.

*DANIEL COHN-BENDIT's views are included, not because we wish to add to the personality cult built up by the press and TV around him, which he has continually repudiated, but because his was the most consistently anarchist voice to be reported. The 22nd March Movement from Nanterre was a combination of the Nanterre Anarchist Group with several other left students' groups. The important statement by the Nanterre Anarchist Group on attitudes to the Vietnam War, "National Liberation or Class War?" was printed in FREEDOM for February 24, 1968, in a translation by Bob Blakeman. (Copies available from Freedom Press for 9d. inc. postage.)*

Q: Some journalists have described you as the leader of the revolution . . .

A: Let them write their rubbish. These people will never be able to understand that the student movement doesn't need any chiefs. I am neither a leader nor a professional revolutionary. I am simply a mouthpiece, a megaphone.

Q: What is the reason for your expulsion from France?

A: I don't begin to understand why de Gaulle had me expelled. Can he really be so stupid?

Q: You talk as if you have a personal hatred for General de Gaulle. . . .

A: It is a tactic, naturally. Above all to defend myself against the accusations of the Party, which wants to pass me off as an agent-provocateur of the regime. And this is because at the moment they do not want de Gaulle to be defeated.

Q: Would you support a Popular Front?

A: A Popular Front at the moment would be an extremely positive step in clarifying the situation: the masses would end up by understanding better the nature of the trade-union bureaucracy and the traditional working-class parties and then an alternative on the left of the Communist Party could very easily be formed.

Q: Isn't that a little bit of an over-simplification?

A: Not at all. Look, there are two extreme possibilities: on the one hand the victory of a fascist-type reaction and the relative defeat of the proletariat for at least a decade. On the other hand there might be the development of a situation like that in Russia at the beginning of this century: 1905 or else February 1917. If it turns out to be a February 1917 situation, say we have a so-called Popular Front with a Kerensky by the name of Mitterand or Waldeck-Rochet. Certainly there is no shortage of Mensheviks: the difficulty is to find any Bolsheviks!

Q: But is it possible to have a French revolution in a vacuum?

A: No. The revolution in one country is certainly not feasible. Also from an economic point of view. An economic crisis, caused for example by social conflict, cannot remain isolated in one country. Or a financial crisis, a dollar crisis, transcends as you know, all countries. The system is international. However we have to begin by undermining each particular part of it, and in Paris that's what we have begun. In Paris the situation could truly be described as pre-revolutionary.

Q: What is the role of the Communist Party in all this?

A: The Party is one of the two power-structures which at the moment are propping each other up. De Gaulle and his State on the one

## View from the East

*Daniel Cohn-Bendit and his allies are werewolves splitting the progressive movement against capitalism.*

—PRAVDA, 30.5.68.

hand, the Party and the Unions on the other. De Gaulle is on the defensive, and he is defending his position of power in the State. The Party is on the defensive because it is obliged to defend its position of power within the working-class movement. Our action, by contrast, is offensive: that is its advantage. All these intermediate and transitory objectives arising from the present situation, all the strong pressures from below, are pushing away at the old structures of power. You know, in this situation, the Party hasn't very much will to take the reins of the bourgeois state into its hands. Moscow is certainly against it: they have very much more reliance on the General than on the little bureaucrats of the French Communist Party.

**Q:** Consequently a Popular Front would detach the masses from the Party?

**A:** Yes, that's more or less the idea, but don't forget that in reality the whole thing is very much more complex. The existence of the Party is an objective reality, one can't decide from one day to another to eliminate it. It is thanks to the Party and the CGT that the concept of the class-struggle has kept its significance in the working-class consciousness. Our accomplishment will be to make conscious the divisions which exist between the declarations of the Party and its actual reformist politics. In the struggles of the last few days we have made enormous strides.

**Q:** But the workers haven't let you enter the factories.

**A:** It's not true. The functionaries of the Party have only partially succeeded in closing the factory gates on us. They have had to do this so as not to lose their position of power, but this has cost them and is going to cost them a great deal.

**Q:** Do you think of the student movement as a new International?

**A:** At the moment there are individual contacts and group contacts on an international level, but it is not yet possible to speak of common action. Action is born from below, from the actual situation. It's just the same as in the struggle against capitalism.

**Q:** Are you thinking, then, of intensifying contact?

**A:** Certainly, but that is not the central problem. Co-ordination would be a positive gain, but a Student International doesn't interest me. It doesn't interest me at all. What we need to form is a new revolutionary left, of which the student movement would be a component. Otherwise the student movement will remain isolated, within the limits of a movement of protest. But we may already be overcoming this. In France, in Italy, and to some extent in Germany, there are already links with the working class, even if they are only at a local level.

**Q:** What do you think will be the organisational form of the new revolutionary movement?

**A:** It isn't yet possible to say. . . . We are creating groups at the bottom: workers and students who collaborate for local action. But I don't think it's possible to be more precise than this.

**Q:** Perhaps they are already the Bolsheviks of the new revolution,

perhaps they have already decided to institute the dictatorship of the proletariat?

**A:** No, not the dictatorship of the proletariat. We are against *all* authority.

**London, June 12th**

**Q:** What exactly do you stand for? Are you a communist?

**A:** I am supporting those who form workers' councils, for self-determination for workers and for students. If this is communist you can call me a communist. But I do not agree with Russian politics. Politics today is not so simple. I am somebody who fights for the *self-government* of the workers. But when I say that I disagree with the policy of the government in Russia, remember that I disagree also with the policy of the governments in Britain, France, Germany, the USA, etc.

**Q:** Danny, you are regarded as the leader of the student movement in France . . .

**A:** Excuse me, I will never lead anything. I will never tell people what to do. What *they* want to do they will do, and what *they* don't want to do they won't.

**Q:** It has been reported that you said you want to seek political asylum in this country.

**A:** It's true I said this. It is a matter of political finesse. I said before that in France there is a pre-fascist situation. Now there was another man who came to this country and asked for asylum when France had a pre-revolutionary situation. This was in 1940 and his name was de Gaulle. He wanted asylum . . .

**Q:** De Gaulle was a Frenchman. Now Danny, you are not a Frenchman . . .

**A:** I do not want to compare myself with de Gaulle, you understand. With the young people it does not matter if you are a Frenchman or a German. We don't bother about borders. I was born in France and I lived there, and I consider myself in this sense a Frenchman. This is how young people think. It is important to me that sixty to seventy thousand people all shouted "We are all German Jews".

**Q:** But Danny, I may be thick, but I still don't understand what sort of government you want.

**A:** We want a workers', peasants', and students' self-government: the people in the factories to control the place where they work and the students to control the place where *they* work.

**Q:** But in the Sorbonne you have got what you were after. Why are

#### **View from the West**

*In the deadly game of rouge et noir that is being played on French streets and in French factories there is more black than red, and but little consideration for the Tricolor.*

—INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 29.5.68.

the students still demonstrating?

A: The students are supporting the working-class. One and a half million workers are still on strike, and they are not striking for the money, they want *control* of what they do.

Q: What is your reaction to the way you have been received in England?

A: Well, not astonished. It seems that all the governments want to show that we are right in saying that we live in a repressive society. I arrive in England and they don't want to let me in. Two years ago I came here and nobody said a word. Strange. I don't have to ask Mr. Wilson and his Home Office if I want to see some people in England . . .

Q: You wouldn't want to give the students here some advice on how to make a revolution?

A: You don't export revolution. No, you don't export protestation against society. You can explain what has been done in France, but it's not advice, you only explain it. You can exchange information about how to play soccer, but you don't export soccer games.

Q: It was said in the House of Lords that you had the intention of using force to carry out plans in this country.

A: A lot of people know more than I know. It's very interesting how all sorts of people know what I'm doing and organising. I must really be better than Batman or Superman, just travelling around and organising world revolution. I think it's because people are afraid because of the situation in England. And then they are afraid that a little thing can explode because people are not happy in this country. Perhaps this is the problem.

#### London, June 13th (BBC TV)

Q: I would like to ask the question: what is the complaint about existing society, why must it be transformed?

A: We criticise all societies where people are passive, which means that they don't actively change what they do, for example where they work or where they live. This is what we want to change. Democracy in every society stops at the work-place or the living-place, and this is why we don't call it democracy.

Q: You wouldn't deny that in fact, after the first outburst of student-worker co-operation the majority of workers have now withdrawn from it

A: It's not true. I think that you should go and have a look at the Renault factory. I'll give you an example. I went to the Flins works with some comrades of the 22nd March Movement and we wanted to talk. The CGT said, "Oh well now, you don't talk", and the workers said, "Let them talk. We want to hear what they have to say." I think that the most important thing, as we have seen in France, is that university students can be an example at one moment, but they cannot make the change alone. If the working class are not going to change the factories themselves, then there won't be a change in society. I think this is the problem you have in Germany: how to get the connection with all the working class. This is the problem.

Q: Now I want to bring you to the question of method and goals. How far would it be fair to say that students in the activist movement really, in a sense, seek confrontation? That they seek thereby to reveal the realities of power in the hands of the state by seeking confrontation and hoping thereby to radicalise the student movement by seeing the reaction? Is that fair? I read my Marcuse too. Some of the leaders claim that there is an advantage in revealing. . . .

(Cries of "Which leaders?") Oh, I can quote you many . . .  
A: Which leaders? I want to know this because I have read in English papers two things. First that we in France want to clash with the police, and secondly that a mob is fighting the police. We have now in France three dead, and I think that two are workers and one is a young lycée student. Now I think that to call them a mob is absolutely inhuman. I don't know which side is the mob, if the mob are the people who used the gases used in Vietnam, or if the mob are the people who want to demonstrate to show how many they are. If you don't let us demonstrate, then we are a mob, just because we are defending ourselves. Never at any time have we said that we want a clash . . .

#### London School of Economics, June 13th (press reports)

"At the LSE he analysed succinctly the lessons of the French revolt: how their actions had outrun their theory and they had been caught up in a vicious circle, constantly tempted out into the streets without time to think what to do; how they should have set about actually running their university with their own lecturers; how the factories controlled by workers should have gone on making things (as they are now doing in a factory in Brest, making transistors and walkie-talkies for other workers). . . ."—*Observer*, 16.6.68.

"French experience, he added, showed that a general strike in 1968 needed to be much more skilfully organised. It was a mistake to include petrol supplies because this had enabled de Gaulle to say: 'After I spoke, you had petrol.' He strongly implied that the workers should have used their occupation of factories to continue production.

"He bitterly criticised the bureaucratic structure of the French Communist Party which had sold out the revolutionary order—the control of factories—in return for elections. As for the French students, they could regain the initiative by starting their autumn term sooner than the authorities intended."—*Guardian*, 14.6.68.

#### London, June 14th (interview with Alexander Mitchell, "Sunday Times", 16.6.68)

DANIEL COHN-BENDIT SAID: Power corrupts. I think I'm corrupted. It's time I left my position and disappeared back down into the movement. He went on: If you lead people they place faith in you. This corrupts. If you say or do something good then people will lean on you and say, "He's okay—he'll do." This is corruption. In any case we don't believe in lasting management. I will cease to be an identifiable leader in less than two months. They don't need me.

Now we aren't prophets, you know. And far from being idealists, we say we are the realists. We say nobody knows where we are going. Johnson doesn't know where he is going. Wilson doesn't know either. Wilson has changed his economic policy three times in 12 months. The disillusionment, of course, is with the Communist and the capitalist systems. What we propose is very difficult for people to understand. People don't have a predisposition to order, they are educated to it. They believe that someone somewhere makes decisions on their behalf, someone leads them, and they also firmly believe that there has to be a central structure of authority. Our problem is to prove they are wrong. There does not have to be an order as we know it now. This has already been shown in the takeover of the universities. . . .

The problem everywhere is how to get an industrial society to a technological society. This gap is difficult. There are two possibilities: the technocratic answer or the revolutionary answer. The revolutionary answer is to give another social structure to society. It does not mean the tearing down of everything.



## Whitsun in the streets

P.B.

THE MOST REVOLUTIONARY IMPRESSION of Paris over the Whitsun weekend was that of the simple freedom of movement and human contact in and around the Sorbonne; a simplicity which ought to be a natural way of behaviour, but which now comes as a surprise in a modern city.

In the Sorbonne itself there is a total lack of suspicion and interference, in spite of fears of attacks by "Occident" (a tough right-wing counter-revolutionary group). The whole world is there—students, workers, foreigners of all descriptions; activists (both serious and controlled, and the wild), liberal intellectuals, tourists. Hundreds of people sleep on floors and benches; there are rooms full of food supplies for the occupying students; and armies of students sweeping up. It seemed the natural thing for us to set up a stove and cook our meal in the Sorbonne courtyard, and other days we cooked and slept in parks and streets all over Paris; nobody objected and it provided a good way of meeting people. There was not a cop to be seen on the Left Bank (except those rushing through in armoured buses).

But there is a seriousness which makes the frivolity important, so that eating and loving and merry-making in the parks becomes both an object and a symbol of the revolution. The Sorbonne scene is run by a series of Action Committees, dealing with relations with the strikers, art and theatre, education, printing of tracts, organising of food, cleaning, etc. Meetings are continually being held to discuss both action and the philosophy of the revolution—live, exciting meetings where political speeches become poetry, both individually and *en masse*. Things happen quickly; some English students arrived on Saturday; got together a large heterogeneous group on the Monday to form an "English Speaking Peoples' Action Committee", discussed a proposal to liberate the British Institute in Paris; and, at 4 p.m. next day, with the co-operation of some students from the Institute and from the Sorbonne, occupied the building. (Many of the teachers seemed quite pleased, and appeared to welcome the opportunity of

teaching the less bourgeois-orientated versions of British culture which are to replace the Cambridge proficiency courses.)

In contrast to the freedom of the Sorbonne, there is the Ecole Des Beaux Arts, which is being run like a para-military poster factory, hard men with helmets and sticks at the gate, questioning every would-be entrant in great detail. The restrictive atmosphere is not reduced by the Stalinesque architecture nor by the shining of torches into eyes in the *dortoir* (where rows of camp beds provide an ordered luxury absent at the Sorbonne). Two friends of mine found that to obtain three posters required the sort of feats of conmanship needed to steal files on draft-dodgers from the Pentagon. But on the other side of the coin, they are serious. They want only people ready to work, for whom there are beds and food. They recently threw out a load of "malingerers". Conscious of the dangers of having "foreign agitators" caught, they would not allow my two friends to go around Paris poster-sticking.

It is presumably the sheer number of people in the Sorbonne which allows it to remain open-to-all, yet relatively secure (as well as the group of "Katangese" toughs who lived there until ejected by the students on June 13th-14th). It would require so many attackers to take the building that they would be dispersed before they had time to group themselves in large enough numbers to be effective. (*A propos* the attacks, a large number of books in the Sorbonne archives were burned on May 31st, a senseless act blamed by the students upon "Occident": but no one was able to verify this. This has been the only sign of vandalism since the revolution began, however.)

Posters, slogans, pamphlets, newspapers, proclaim every left-wing philosophy known (with the possible exception of the CP: I only saw one sign, which announced "The French CP does not want to change society, only the Government", but this may have been a Trotskyist joke). A good news-sheet, *Le Pave* (The Paving Stone) prints a day-by-day account of the barricades and a letter on Black Power by Rap Brown; also a letter from the Soldiers Committee of Vincennes, warning soldiers of the dangers of being used by the Government to break strikes: "You are the sons of the people . . . to isolate you from the people it (the Government) orders you to the barracks . . . demand your passes. . . ." The *Voix Ouvriere*, a Trotskyist paper run mainly by workers, preaches full co-operation between workers and students, denounces the CP and the elections. Several strikers we talked to who were on guard duty at the Renault factory at Billancourt did want complete revolution of the political system, did not support the CGT, but otherwise seemed fairly orthodox Communists, supported the Russian system and believed that elections would achieve revolution. According to one striker the average wage for operatives is about £18 a week, including bonuses, and it is perhaps an example of the French approach to life that it is the better-off workers, and those working in one of the most alienating work situations of

all, who are the first to demand changes in the power structure.

However, they had no clear idea as to who they wanted to form a Government (certainly neither de Gaulle, Mitterand nor Mendes-France).

Despite the proliferation of revolutionary ideas at the Sorbonne, as Cohn-Bendit pointed out at the LSE Teach-in on June 13th, the intellectuals were caught unawares by the sudden eruptions, without having formed a coherent and cohesive philosophy on which to base action after the crisis had occurred. This task has yet to be done, and the lack of such a philosophy may be one of the main reasons why the strikers did not take over the running of their factories, nor take control of the distribution services. (There is also the reluctance of the CGT to commit any "illegal act".) The ensuing paralysis was an important factor in generating the return to work.

I have an impression that the press is trying to exaggerate the split between the CP and the more militant left, with the object of both discrediting the CP morally, and demonstrating the ineffectiveness of the remainder: a *France-Soir* journalist we talked to thought that the CGT were philosophically behind the Renault workers, but that they did not want to commit themselves publicly to what they thought would be a failed revolution: so they simply arranged that the terms they negotiated with the government would be bound to be thrown out by the workers.

One of the most hopeful signs during the revolution has been the involvement of professional groups. *Le Monde* ran an account of a meeting on May 23rd of 700 architects in the Institut d'Urbanisme, which gave full support to the students and decided to participate through their profession in the movement towards changing the structure of society and of the professions. They have also occupied their regional council office, and intend to hold all future meetings at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. (*L'Express* reports that the occupation of the architects' regional council offices was undertaken by a group of which 90% were architects and only 10% students.)

A "Commission of Inter-Professional Relations" (Ex-ENSBA) consisting of groups of architects, city-planners, highway engineers, builders, masons, social psychologists, etc., voted unanimously at a meeting on June 1st, to set up an organisation to fight against the capitalist structure of the professions.

Practically every educational institution in Paris has been taken over: a friend of mine at a school for interpreters, for example, has spent the past two weeks working extremely hard on the details of a new "constitution" for his college.

The main work of the students over the Whit weekend appeared to be the organising of groups to go to the factories to help persuade the strikers to continue. The seriousness had not evaporated over the hot sunny weekend. The Odéon on Tuesday was still packed with ardent debaters, speaking in rapid but ordered succession. The atmosphere was holiday, but a heady holiday which was no escape

from life, like our standard fortnights in Blackpool or Torremolinos, but a confirmation of life. A holiday in which everyone participated, a holiday which everyone had themselves created (in this sense it was more than the joyful feeling of disruption produced by heavy snowfalls or power failures). The crowds in the Sorbonne did perhaps appear to be milling about aimlessly, but it was the open aimlessness of people searching, questioning, come to discover the situation and their part in it, and by their very being there they made the situation.

The Sorbonne so clearly stands for something, indefinable, but definitely something much more than the system of human relationships we survive on at the moment. Even when the present excitement and openness has died down, as Cohn-Bendit says, the people now know their power, and even if there is no immediate change in work conditions and relationships, people who feel that the mechanised role-playing life is again overpowering them, can continue to provoke crisis after crisis until the changes do occur. The renewed attacks upon the police of June 11th showed that the students have by no means lost hope in the revolution: and whether or not revolution is achieved, the affluence of Western society in general and the committed position taken by so many French professionals, intellectuals and students, are bound to ensure that substantial changes do occur within the educational and professional systems.

It is more difficult to predict what will happen in the factories. But perhaps the whole feeling of the revolution was crystallised in the meeting we had with a group of anarchist workers when we were cooking our supper in the street in Les Halles, during the monster traffic jam on the Tuesday evening. They leapt out of a café on top of us, asked us what we thought of the revolution, declared the strike was continuing 100%, clenched fists, proclaimed; "*C'est une révolution de vivre, les patrons, les ouvriers, tous les deux*", and "*Les syndicats sont dépassés, dépassés*", leapt into a big Citroën van shouting they were off to the provinces to spread the word, and just disappeared down the street where traffic had been moving at the rate of two car-lengths every minute. A minute later they were gone, but leaving a stronger impression on us than any other people in Paris.

#### View from the Island

*Christopher Logue, poet laureate of the Left, asked earnestly what We in Britain could do: that, said Cohn-Bendit wearily, is your problem. Kenneth Tynan, in a kimono shirt, kept inquiring how rebellion could succeed without army support. Among iconoclastic cheers, Cohn-Bendit resorted to (Anglo-Saxon) four-letter words. You felt, breaking free of the shambles, that the only thing our Fidelistas will be able to do with paving stones is drop them on their feet.*

—THE GUARDIAN, 13.6.68.

# Paris: May 1968

This pamphlet describes the events in the streets of Paris, at the Renault works, the Sorbonne "soviet", the propaganda section at the Centre Censier, the march to Billancourt on May 16th, and it documents the changing line of the French CP and the CGT, and draws conclusions for the future.

1s. 3d. post free from Solidarity, c/o Heather Russell, 53a Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent.

*The black flag that flew last week above the tumultuous student disorders of Paris stood for a philosophy that the modern world has all but forgotten: anarchy. Few of the students who riot in France, Germany or Italy—or in many another country—would profess outright allegiance to anarchy, but its basic tenets inspire many of their leaders. Germany's "Red Rudi" Dutschke and France's "Red Danny" Cohn-Bendit openly espouse anarchy. "In theory," says West German Political Scientist Wolfgang Abendroth, "the students are a species of Marxists, but in practice they are anarchists." Not since the anarchist surge in the Spanish Civil War has the Western world seen a movement so enthusiastically devoted to the destruction of law, order and society in the name of unlimited individual freedom.*

—TIME MAGAZINE, 24.5.68.

Anarchy next month:

# Student Anarchy